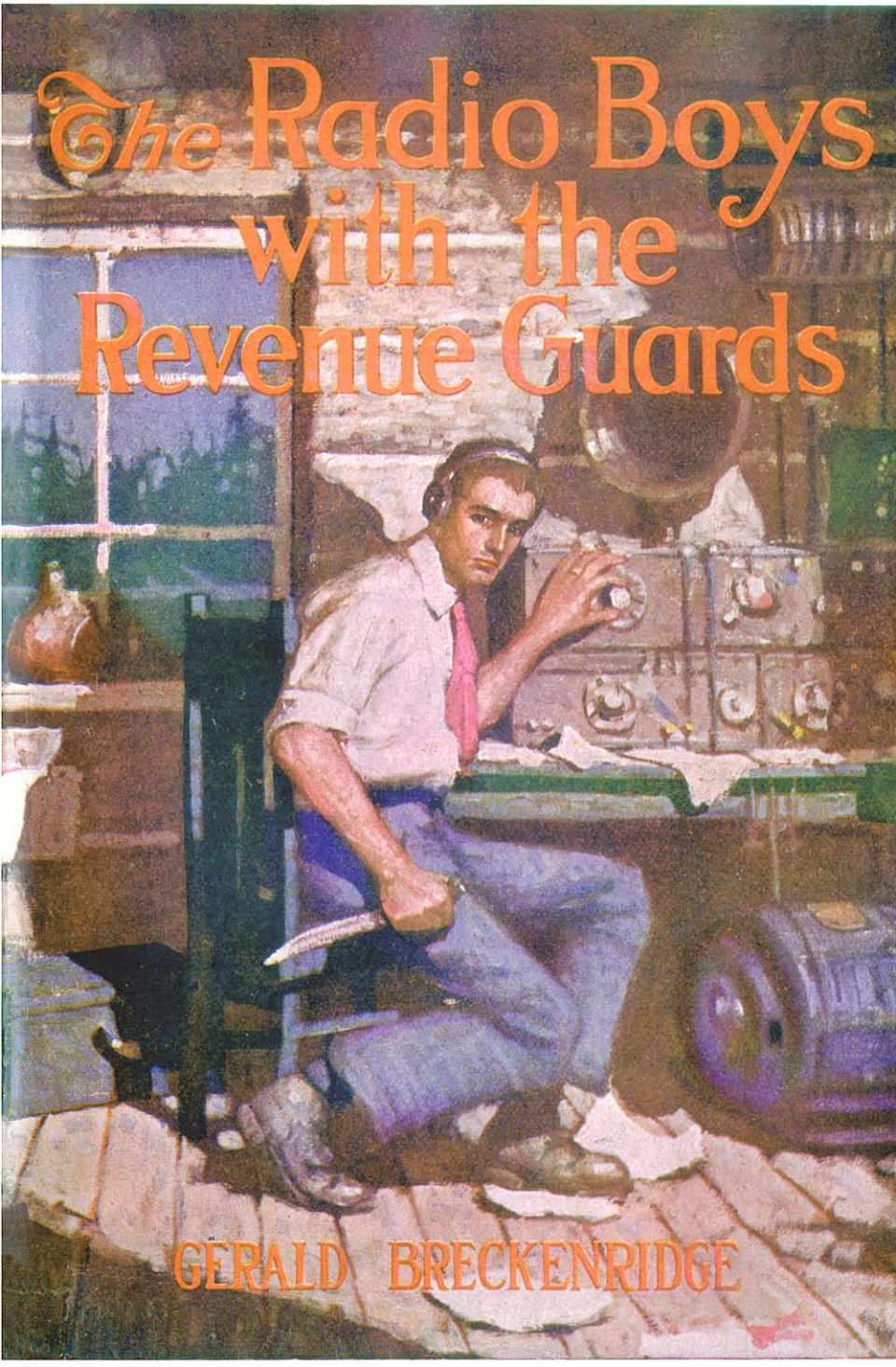
The Radio Boys with the Revenue Guards



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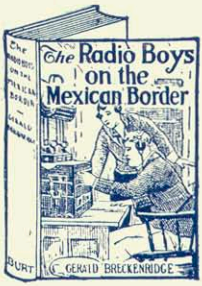

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With the Revenue Guards

GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

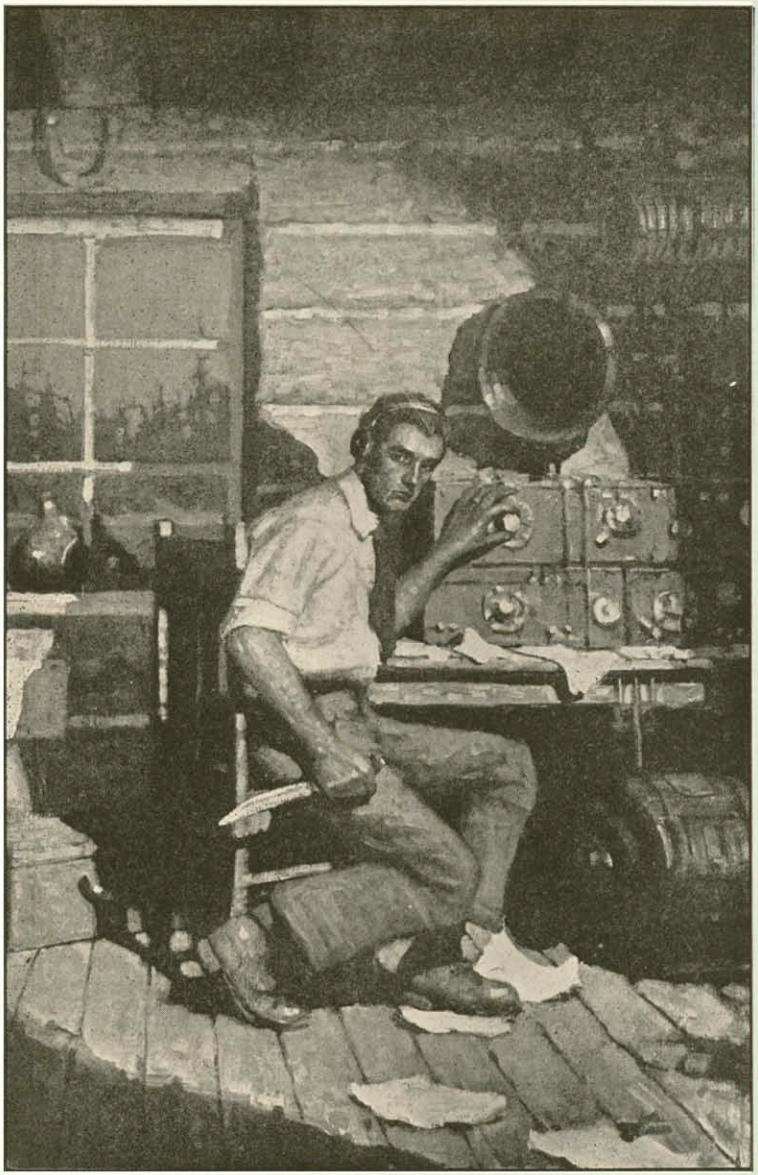
Christmas Greetings

from

Mother

Dec 1923

The Radio Boys with the Revenue Guards



He sprang to the instrument table, seized and adjusted a headpiece, pulled a transmitter to him, he began calling.

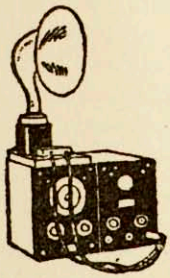
(*Radio Boys With the Revenue Guards*) *Page 140*

THE RADIO BOYS WITH THE REVENUE GUARDS

By GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

AUTHOR OF

"The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border," "The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty," "The Radio Boys' Search for the Inca's Treasure," "The Radio Boys Rescue the Lost Alaska Expedition."



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Publishers New York

THE

RADIO BOYS SERIES

A Series of Stories for Boys of All Ages

By GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border
The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty
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Copyright, 1922
By A. L. BURT COMPANY

THE RADIO BOYS WITH THE REVENUE GUARDS

Made in "U. S. A."

CHAPTER I

TWO MYSTERIES

"Not much like last summer, is it, Jack?"

"Not much, Frank."

"No Mexican bandits. No Chinese bad men. No dens in Chinatown. Say, Jack, remember how you felt when we were licked in our attempt to escape from that dive out in San Francisco? Boy, that was the time when things looked mighty blue. Jack?"

No answer.

"Jack?" In a louder tone.

Still no answer.

Frank turned around impatiently from where he lounged in the open doorway of the radio station, and faced his chum at the receiver.

"Oh, listening-in," he exclaimed, and fell silent. Facing about, he gazed southward to where, less than a mile away, sparkled in the bright July sunshine the clear waters of the open Atlantic.

Frank Merrick was thinking of the adventures crowded into the lives of himself and his two chums,

Jack Hampton and Bob Temple, during their summer vacation the previous year. All three boys were sons of wealthy parents and lived on country estates at the far end of Long Island. Jack's mother was dead. Frank who was an orphan, lived with the Temples. All had attended Harrington Hall Military Academy, but Jack, a year older and a class ahead of his chums, had graduated the previous spring and already had spent his Freshman year at Yale.

The previous year Jack had gone to New Mexico with his father, an engineer, who was then superintendent in charge of field operations of a syndicate of independent oil operators. Mr. Hampton had been captured by Mexican rebels, and rescued by the boys, for Frank and Bob with Mr. Temple had joined Jack after his father's loss. Later Mr. Temple had taken the boys on to San Francisco with him, and there they had become involved in the plottings of a gang of Chinese and white men, smuggling coolies into the country in violation of the Exclusion Act.

It is not to be wondered at that Frank, dreaming of those adventurous days as he lounged in the doorway, felt a twinge of regret at what promised to be a dull vacation by comparison.

It was true, he thought, they had everything to

make them happy and keep them interested, however. Here was the powerful radio station built by Mr. Hampton under government license to use an 1,800 meter wave length, for purposes of trans-oceanic experiment. Then, too, Frank and Bob jointly owned a powerful all-metal plane, equipped with radio, and adapted for land or water flying. Besides, there was the new and powerful speed boat bought for the three of them this summer by Mr. Hampton and Mr. Temple.

And their homes were admirably located for vacationing, too. On the far end of Long Island, miles from another human habitation, with dense woods, miles of lonely beach, and the open sea—all at their command. Well, Frank thought, after all it might not be so exciting a summer as the last, yet the three of them ought to be able to have a pretty good time.

An exclamation of anger from Jack caused Frank to face about. His chum had taken the receiver from his head.

"That interference again?" asked Frank.

"Yes," replied Jack, rising and joining his chum in the doorway. "Oh, there comes Bob," he added, pointing to a tall, broad figure swinging over the top of a low sandhill from the beach.

Frank's glance followed in the direction Jack indicated. Although Bob was still distant there was

a purposefulness about his stride and about the way he waved a response to their greetings that caught his chum's attention.

"Bob's got something on his mind," he said, with conviction. "Wonder what it is?"

"Maybe, he found something, hiking along the beach."

"Maybe, he did," agreed Frank. "I didn't feel like hitting it up with him this morning, felt kind of lazy, as if I had spring fever. It would be just my luck to have him make a discovery on the one morning I wasn't along with him."

Bob's figure disappeared in a fold in the sandhills, and Frank remembering Jack's disgust over interference in the radio receivers, began to question him about it while waiting for Bob to arrive.

"What was it like this time, Jack?" he asked.

"Just the same, only worse," answered Jack. "Tune up to 1,375 meters for receiving and then comes that snarling, whining, shrieking sound. It's steady, too. If it were dot and dash stuff, I might be able to make something out of it. But somebody somewhere is sending a continuous wave, at a meter length, too, that is practically never used. From 1,100 meters to 1,400 meters, you know, is reserved and unused wave territory."

"I wonder what it can be," said Frank.

Bob by now had approached within calling distance, and he was so excited that he began to run.

"What's the matter?" called Frank.

"Somebody chasing you?" asked Jack, as the big fellow ploughed through the sand and halted before them.

Bob grinned tantalizingly.

"What would you give to know?"

"At him, boys. At him," cried Jack, making a flying tackle.

His arms closed about Bob's waist. At the same time, Frank who had been standing to one side, dived in. His grip tightened about Bob's legs below the knees. All three lads rolled over in the sand in a laughing, struggling heap. Presently, Jack and Frank bestrode the form of their big chum and Frank, who sat on his chest, gripped Bob's crisply curling hair.

"Now will you tell?" he demanded in mock ferocity. "If you don't ——"

"All right, you big bully," answered Bob. "Why don't you pick on a fellow your size?"

With which remark, he gave a mighty heave—as Frank afterwards described it "like a whale with a tummyache"—and Frank and Jack went sprawling. Then he stood upright, brushing the sand from his khaki walking clothes.

"Oh, is that you down there?" he asked. "Why, where did you come from?"

Then, as Frank made a clutch for his ankle, he brushed him aside and sat down on the sand:

"Say, listen, cut out the fooling. I've got something to tell you fellows."

Bob was so plainly excited that his chums were impressed. Scrambling up they seated themselves beside him.

"Fire away," said Jack.

"What would you say to my finding the tracks of a peg-legged man coming up out of the sea, crossing the sands of Starfish Cove and disappearing into the trees beyond there?"

The inlet which Bob thus referred to was some three miles distant, with a patch of timber some twenty yards back from the water and a ring of low sandhills behind the woods.

"A peg-legged man?" said Frank. "That certainly sounds piratical. Go on. Your imagination is working well to-day."

"Did he arrive in a boat?" asked Jack.

Bob nodded.

"Yes. I found where the boat had been run up on the sand. But—he didn't leave. The boat went away without him. He disappeared inland, and there were no tracks marking his return."

Jack whistled.

"Whew. Did you follow?"

"Did I follow? Huh. You can just bet I did follow. And, say, fellows ——"

"What?"

"I know now where that strange interference in our radio receivers comes from."

"Is that so?" demanded Jack, excitedly. "It was cutting up didoes just a few minutes ago, just before you arrived. Had been for some time, too."

"Well," said Bob, "that's not to be wondered at. For when I followed Peg Leg's tracks through the trees I discovered a radio station tucked away in a hollow behind the timber, with sandhills hiding it on the landward side. I watched for a while from behind a tree, but couldn't see anybody. Then I hustled here to tell you fellows about it."

Puzzled, the trio regarded each other in silence. Presently Jack spoke.

"Look here, fellows. There's something queer about this. A mysterious radio station, hidden away, that sends a continuous wave on a hitherto unused wave length. This has been going on for a week. What does it mean? Then there is this man, this Peg Leg, whom Bob discovers arriving from the sea."

"Let's go together and investigate," cried Frank, jumping to his feet.

"I'm with you," declared Bob, also arising. "I would have gone up to the station and done that very thing, by myself, but—I don't know—there was something about it all—something sinister."

"Wait a minute, you fellows," said Jack, also springing upright. "We can't go putting our heads into trouble recklessly. Bob's good sense prompted him when he refrained from pushing up to that radio station by himself. There is something sinister about this. That place is isolated, there are no roads near it, nobody ever hikes along that beach except us. How did the station ever come to be built? Why, the material and supplies must have been brought by boat. They couldn't have been transported overland very well."

"What shall we do, though, Jack?" asked Frank, impatiently. "You can't reasonably expect to have a thing like this rubbed under our noses without our going ahead and investigating."

There was so much plaintiveness in his voice, as of a child from whom a toy was being withheld, that Bob and Jack both burst into laughter. Then Jack sobered.

"Tell you what I think," he said. "It's only mid-afternoon. Let's get out your plane, and take a look at this place from the air."

"I guess the old boat is working all right now,"

said Frank. "How about it, Bob? You know we haven't been up for two or three weeks, Jack. Bob's been tinkering with it. When I last saw him at work, he seemed to have the engine entirely dismantled. Looked to me as if he had enough parts for three planes. Did you get it together again, Bob?"

"Yes," said Bob. "And she'll fly now, boy, believe me. Well, come on," he added, starting for the hangar, not far distant but out of sight behind the sandhills.

The others followed.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE AIRPLANE APPEARS

FROM the Hampton radio station to the hangar on the Temple estate where Frank and Bob kept their plane was a short jaunt, and the ground soon was covered. Then Bob unlocked the big double doors and rolled them back, and the three trundled the plane out to the skidway where Jack spun the propeller while Bob manipulated the controls. As the machine got under way, Jack ran alongside and was helped in by Frank.

Out over the sandy landing field trundled the plane, rising so quickly that Bob nodded with satisfaction. The loving work he had put in on the machine had not been wasted. It was in fine flying condition.

They were not far from the coast and in a very short time were flying over the water, whereupon Bob made a sweep to the right and the plane headed westward. The Atlantic rocked gently below, serene under a smiling sun and with only the merest whisper of a breeze caressing it. On the southern horizon

a plume or two of smoke, only faintly discernible, marked where great liners were standing in for the distant metropolis. To the north, far away, showed a sail or two, of fishing craft or coastwise schooner.

An exclamation escaped Frank and he leaned sidewise, gripping Jack by the arm and pointing with his free hand. But Jack had a radio receiver clamped on his head and was frowning. He glanced only hastily in the direction indicated by Frank, then shut his eyes as if in an effort at concentration.

Frank continued to gaze, then bent down and unlashed a pair of binoculars from a pocket in the pit and, putting the glasses to his eyes, threw back his head and began scanning the sky. After staring long minutes, he hastily put aside the glasses, lifted the radio transmitter strapped to his chest and spoke in it to Bob:

"Bob, there's a plane overhead. So high you can't see it with the naked eye. But I spotted it before it rose too high, and followed it with the glasses. The fellow's up where the sun plays tricks with your eyesight. And, Bob, I've got a hunch he's watching us. There's Starfish Cove below us now. Keep right on flying. Don't turn inland."

Bob nodded, and the plane continued its way westward offshore. Frank again took up the glasses and searched the sky, gradually increasing the focal

radius. An exclamation from Frank and a hurried request in the transmitter presently reached Bob's ears:

"Shut her off, Bob, and let's land on the water. Quick. I'll explain in a minute."

Obediently, big Bob shut off the engine, and the plane coasted on a long slant to a safe landing some hundreds of yards out from the sandy, deserted shore.

Bob and Jack snatched the headpieces off, and turned inquiringly to their chum.

"Here," cried Frank, pressing the glasses into Bob's hands. "Take a look. That plane is landing way back there, and I believe it is at Starfish Cove."

Bob was too late to see if the situation was as Frank described, however. Putting up the glasses, he turned to his chum.

"Tell us about it," he said.

"Yes," said Jack. "I heard what you told Bob, but not having the glasses I couldn't see. At first, when you punched me, besides, I was thinking over that business of the strange interference with our radio and wondering what it could be. So I didn't get to see. I suppose you were trying to point out this other plane to me then?"

Frank nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it was just a tiny speck at that

time, but I could see it with the naked eye. However, it disappeared immediately afterwards."

"Well, what made you believe the other plane was watching us?" inquired Bob.

Frank laughed in half-embarrassed fashion.

"Oh, one of my hunches," he said.

His two chums grinned understandingly at each other. It was a recognized fact among them that Frank was super-sensitive and frequently, as a result, received sharp impressions concerning people and events which were unsupported by evidence at the time, but which later proved to be correct. Frank was the slightest of the trio, of only medium height but wiry build, while Bob and Jack both were six feet tall and Bob, besides, had a broad and powerful frame.

"Seeing spooks again?" chaffed Bob.

Immediately, they became more serious as Frank, ignoring the banter, leaned forward and made his proposal:

"That plane landed, and I believe it landed at Starfish Cove. Let's fly back and take a look. See what's it like, at any rate."

"Good idea," approved Jack.

Bob had been taxying about slowly since landing, in order to keep the engine going and the propeller slowly revolving. Now he picked up speed, straight-

ened out, shifted the lifting plane, and the machine shot forward, skirled over the water and presently took the air.

For some minutes they flew in silence, at no great height, and a little distance out from the coast. Bob's attention was devoted to the plane, but Frank and Jack scanned the shore with eager eyes. Presently they saw what they were looking for. A strange plane rode in the lazy swell offshore in Starfish Cove. There was nobody aboard. Not a soul was in sight on land. The little stretch of sandy beach, between the two horns of the cove, stretched untenanted back to the thick fringe of trees.

Bob swooped so low the plane almost skimmed the water, and all three obtained a good view of the stranger, before once more Bob soared aloft and forged ahead. Looking back, Frank trained the glasses on the scene. But nobody appeared from among the trees, and, far as they could determine, they were unobserved.

They made a quick run to their own landing field, descended and put the plane away. Not until the doors were closed and locked did they sit down on the skidway outside the hangar to discuss what they had seen. There had been remarks made by all after they had seen the strange plane at close range and on the hasty trip home, but all had been

too busy with their own thoughts for extended discussion.

Discovery of the plane had altered their original plans to fly over the secret radio station. They had decided not to advertise their presence as, if Frank was correct in his surmise that the other plane had been watching them, their return would create suspicion and put the mysterious strangers on guard against them.

"They may be on a perfectly legitimate enterprise, whoever they are," Jack said, as all three took seats on the skidway.

"And we may be fools for butting in where we have no business to be," said Bob. "That your idea?"

"Yes."

"But look here," said Frank. "I have the feeling that there's something about all this business that isn't open and aboveboard. I, for one, vote that we do our best to find out what is going on."

Jack sat silent for several moments.

"That isn't what concerns me at the present moment, after all," he said. "Whether these people with their strange plane and their secret radio are on legitimate business or not, doesn't interest me so much. What puzzles me—and I reckon it puzzles the rest of you, too—is the design of that plane."

The others nodded vigorously.

"What a tiny thing," was Frank's comment.

"I was busy and couldn't see much," supplemented Bob. "But what impressed me was her short hood. Why, she looked as if she had no engine at all."

"That's right," agreed Frank. "I never saw a plane like it. And I can't recall any designs of that nature, either. It must be a foreign-built plane, one of those little one-man things the Germans and French have been building."

Jack shook his head, puzzled.

"There's something strange about it," he said, "a little thing like that, with practically no engine space. Another thing that you fellows want to remember, too, is that probably it has been flying about here for some time, yet we have never heard it. Now, down here the sound of most planes would travel far, in this quiet and secluded place, where there are no competing noises."

"Why do you say it has been flying about here for some time?" asked Bob.

"Well, the familiarity with which the aviator landed shows he's been at Starfish Cove before. Evidently, after landing he struck inland to that secret radio station, because we saw no sign of him."

"We haven't been up in the air for three weeks," said Frank. "That plane might easily have come

and gone in that time without our seeing it. But, surely, as Jack says, we would have heard it at some time or other. Haven't either of you heard the sound of a plane lately?" he appealed to the others. "I know I haven't."

Bob and Jack both shook their heads in negation.

"No planes ever come out this way," Bob said. "They fly south or north of us, but not out here. I haven't heard anything."

Jack rose and stretched.

"Well, I, for one, vote that we do not pursue our investigations into this mystery by going back and, perhaps, getting peppered with gunshot."

"But, Jack," protested Bob, the impetuous, "we want to know what's going on. You can't have a mystery dumped right in your own dooryard without digging into it."

Frank was thoughtful.

"That's true, Bob, old thing," he said. "Just the same, I agree with Jack. What do you say to laying the matter before Uncle George and Mr. Hampton at dinner? Jack and his father are coming over to our house to-night, you know."

"Good," said Jack. "We can put it up to them, and, perhaps, they will know something about the man who owns that land around Starfish Cove, where this secret radio is located."

Big Bob grumbled. Delay irked his soul.

"All right, you old grumbler," laughed Frank. "Come on, I'll give you some action. We have several hours of good daylight left before dinner-time. I'll take you on at tennis. Della and I will play you and Jack, and we won't give you time to worry about anything."

Della was Bob's sister, two years younger than he. Frank, whose parents were dead and who lived with the Temples, referring to Mr. Temple, his guardian, as "Uncle George," was very fond of her. The others joshed him about Della frequently. Bob took occasion to do so now, as the three walked away from the hangar toward the Temple home and tennis courts.

"Huh," he said, "you'll be looking at your partner so often you won't be able to play. Why, you won't even be good practice for Jack and me."

CHAPTER III

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

DELLA was lithe-limbed, quick of eye and strong of wrist, a born tennis player. As for Frank, tennis was the one sport at which he could excel his chums. The result was that, despite the strong game played by Jack and Bob, Frank and Della won two sets, 7-5, 8-6.

Mr. Hampton appeared on the scene when the second set stood at six-all, bringing with him an alert, thin-faced man of middle age, clad in the uniform of a colonel in the United States Engineers. Mr. Temple with his wife emerged from the house to greet their guests, and all four were interested spectators of the two concluding games which were bitterly contested, went to deuce a number of times, but finally were won by Della and Frank.

"Well, Jack," said Mr. Hampton, jokingly, as the players joined the spectators at the conclusion of the set; "I suppose you were just being chivalrous and that's why Della beat you."

Jack grinned. He and Bob knew they would be in for a certain amount of twigging because of their defeat, but he knew how to take it in good part.

"Chivalrous? Oh, yes," he scorned. "We'd have beaten that pair of kids if we had been able. But it couldn't be done. Della's got a serve there that would put Mlle. Lenglen to shame. As for Frank, the boy goes crazy when he plays tennis."

A general laugh greeted his generous praise of his opponents. Then Mr. Hampton turned to his companion and introduced him to the players as "Colonel Graham."

After that the players hurried away to brush up and prepare for dinner.

"Shall we speak of our discoveries this afternoon?" asked Frank, brushing his hair while big Bob peered over his shoulder into the mirror, adjusting his tie.

"Why not?" asked Bob.

"Well, on account of this Colonel Graham. Who is he, by the way, Jack?"

Jack did not know. He recalled, or believed he recalled, that his father had spoken of a friend named Colonel Graham who was a famous engineer.

"But if he's a friend of Dad's," added Jack, with calm confidence, "you can count on it that he's a

good sport. It will be safe to speak about our discoveries before him."

At dinner it developed that Colonel Graham was, indeed, a friend of Mr. Hampton. They had been classmates years before at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During the World War, Colonel Graham had obtained a reserve commission in the Engineers and, at the conclusion of hostilities, while thousands of other officers were being demobilized, he had been given a commission in the regular army because of his distinguished record.

At dinner, the older people took the lead in the conversation, while the boys and Della were content to listen unless addressed. Colonel Graham was a brilliant conversationalist, and once he became launched on a series of war stories there was no time for the boys to interrupt, nor had they any inclination. He had been one of the handful of American engineers impressed into a make-shift army by General Byng to stop the Germans when they smashed through at Cambrai, and his gripping account of those days and nights of superhuman effort to hold back the enemy until reinforcements arrived, had the boys neglecting their dinner and sitting on the edges of their chairs.

Mr. Hampton was a radio enthusiast. It was his interest in radio development, in fact, which had

caused him to build the station on his estate, for purposes of trans-oceanic experiment. Eventually, therefore, the talk came around to the subject of radio. Colonel Graham was well-informed, and he told of several army officers then at work on behalf of the government at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, experimenting with radio-controlled automobiles, tanks and water craft.

An exclamation from Jack drew attention to him, and covered him with confusion.

"Well, Jack," said his father, in mild reproof. And he looked expectantly at his son as if awaiting an explanation.

Frank came to his rescue. His quick mind also had grasped the significance of Colonel Graham's remark.

"I know what Jack is thinking of, Mr. Hampton," he said. "He's thinking of a radio-controlled airplane."

Colonel Graham smiled.

"Oh, yes," he said, tolerantly. "I mentioned only that these government experts were experimenting with radio-controlled automobiles, tanks and water craft. Of course, airplanes are being studied, too. Is that what you mean?" he asked, looking inquiringly at Jack. "I understand you lads are interested in flying."

"No, sir," answered Jack, flushing a bit. "To tell you the truth, we saw a plane to-day of strange design. And we had reason to believe it was controlled by radio. I was puzzled at the time. I didn't think of radio controls. But your remarks about the officers at Massachusetts Tech. were illuminating. I see now that this plane must have been radio-controlled."

Frank and Bob nodded approval. Their eyes were shining. Mr. Hampton, Mr. Temple and Colonel Graham showed startled interest. Della leaned forward close to Frank and looked at him reproachfully, a hand on his arm.

"And you never told me a thing about it," she said.

"Didn't have any time to tell you," whispered Frank, in an undertone.

Mr. Hampton was speaking.

"Where did you see this plane, Jack?"

"Well, Dad," said Jack, "it was this way." Then he paused and looked at his chums. "Shall I tell?"

"Go ahead, Jack," urged Frank.

Bob nodded approval.

With that Jack told as briefly as possible the circumstances of their day's adventure, and also spoke of the recent interference in their radio receivers by a sharp and continuous dash sounded over a wave

length of 1,375 meters. A frown of growing concentration fastened on Mr. Temple's brow as Jack proceeded. When it was apparent that Jack had concluded, Mr. Temple leaned forward.

"I suspected there was something mysterious about that man," he said.

"What man?" asked Mr. Hampton.

The others at the table looked blank.

"Why, the chap who bought the old Brownell house and property. You know the place. There are about 750 acres of land, mainly timber. This inlet, Starfish Cove as the boys call it, is on the property. And there is an old house back in the trees. It is isolated, there is no habitation near, and the house has a bad name to boot. Some of the old-timers in the settlement at the crossroads declare the place is haunted."

"So that is part of the Brownell property?" asked Mr. Hampton.

The boys looked at each other. Della surreptitiously squeezed Frank's hand beneath the table. This promised to be interesting. The Brownell place was one of the delightful bugaboos of their childhood. Old Captain Brownell, a Yankee whaling skipper, was long since dead. The house had stood boarded up and untenanted for years. Tradition declared he had committed acts of piracy on the high

seas during the period of his whaling voyages and that, having retired uncaught, he had come down to this secluded nook and built the great house in order to hide there from some of his old associates whom he had cheated, but that they had found and slain him. It was his ghost, it was said in the countryside, which haunted the place.

"Yes," replied Mr. Temple, in answer to Mr. Hampton's question. "Starfish Cove and all that land around there, where Bob found this secret radio plant located, is part of the Brownell property."

"And who is this man who bought it?" asked Bob, putting the question in all minds.

"I don't even know his name," confessed Mr. Temple. "But what I do recall are some things told me by McKay, a real estate dealer in the city who had the Brownell property on his list for a long time. He said this chap who bought the place impressed him as a man who only recently had come into the possession of money, and he wondered what he wanted with the Brownell property. The newly-rich man usually wants to make a splurge, he doesn't want to buy a country home away off somewhere, in an out of the way nook, where people can't see him. He wants to be seen.

"This man, on the contrary, apparently wanted seclusion—and he wanted a place in a secluded spot

on the seacoast. That was his impressing requirement. So McKay sold him the Brownell place.

"Afterward, said McKay, he learned the new owner had put up signs all around the property, warning away trespassers. McKay said he even understood guards were to be employed to keep out intruders."

"On the landward side of that old Brownell place, Dad, they've built a high fence of heavy strands of wire on steel poles," said Bob. "I bumped into it the other day. They haven't quite reached the shore with it, however, although I suppose they intend to."

"Well, this is interesting," said Mr. Hampton. "I wonder ——"

He paused, looking thoughtful.

"What, Dad?" asked Jack.

"Oh," said his father. "New York undoubtedly is the center of powerful groups of men seeking to evade the prohibition law by bringing liquor illicitly into the country. Much of the liquor is brought by ship from the Bahamas and the West Indies, and then smuggled ashore in various ways. Perhaps, the old Brownell house, built by a pirate of yesterday, is the home of a modern pirate, who directs activities from this secluded spot."

CHAPTER IV

ON THE TRAIL

AFTER a rather late breakfast next morning for, it being vacation, the boys were under no necessity to rise early and being healthy lads took full measure of sleep, Jack appeared at the Temple home, and the three went into conference. Mr. Temple, head of a big exporting firm, had left early for the city by automobile. Mr. Hampton, reported Jack, had done likewise with his guest.

"Fellows," said Jack, "when I got up this morning, it was with the feeling that this mystery was too good to be overlooked."

Frank's eyes brightened.

"Just the way I feel about it," he declared. "I told Bob when we were dressing that we were in luck, because right at the moment it was beginning to look as if we were in for a dull summer, Fortune went and put an exciting mystery on our doorstep."

Big Bob yawned.

"Oh, you fellows don't know when you have a

good thing," he said. "I suppose you want to go and stir up a lot of trouble as you did last summer. Why can't you let well enough alone?"

They were in the sitting room shared by Bob and Frank, and the latter picking up a handy pillow promptly smothered his big chum with it and then sat on him.

"Don't mind him, Jack," he panted, in the resulting tussle. "He's always like this when he gets up in the morning."

A spirited engagement followed, from which Jack discreetly kept apart. Presently, when the couch was a wreck and Bob had Frank over his knees and was preparing to belabor him, Jack interfered.

"Listen to reason, you fellows," he pleaded. "I've got a proposal."

"Shall we listen to the proposal, Frank?" asked Bob, now fully awake, and grinning broadly. "Or shall we muss him up a bit?"

" 'Ark to his Royal 'Ighness," shouted Frank, his equilibrium restored. " 'Ear. 'Ear."

"Very well," said Bob, addressing Jack with mock solemnity. "My friend says you are to be spared. But, mind you, it must be a good proposal. Now, out with it."

Jack, ensconed in a deep easy chair, uncrossed his knees and leaned forward.

"You remember what was said last night about the operations of the liquor smugglers in and around New York?" he inquired.

The others nodded.

After the conversation the previous night had been directed by the revelations of the boys regarding their mysterious neighbors, and by Mr. Hampton's comments on the operations of liquor smugglers, the boys had learned from the older men surprising facts regarding the situation.

Since the adoption of prohibition, they had been told, liquor-smuggling had grown to such an extent that a state of war between the smugglers and the government forces practically existed. Single vessels and even fleets were engaged by the smugglers to bring liquor up from the West Indies and land it on the Long Island and New Jersey coasts, and to combat these operations the government had formed a so-called "Dry-Navy" comprising an unknown number of speedy submarine chasers. A number of authentic incidents known to Colonel Graham and to Mr. Hampton and Mr. Temple had been related in which the daring of the smugglers had discomfited the government men, in one case a cargo of liquor having been landed at a big Manhattan dock by night and removed in trucks while a sub chaser patrolling the waterfront passed the scene of opera-

tions several times, unsuspecting. There were other stories, too, of how the tables were turned, an occasion being cited when a sub chaser put a shot across the bow of what appeared to be a Gloucester fishing schooner which thereupon showed a clean pair of heels and tried to escape but was run down and captured inside the three-mile limit and proved to contain a $30,000 cargo of West Indian rum.

Some of these facts, of course, had appeared in the newspapers. Others had not been made public. But, far from New York City as they were and not interested in reading about news events, for they had their own interest to engage their attention, the boys were not familiar with the situation. What they had been told came as a tremendously interesting revelation.

"Very well," continued Jack, as Bob and Frank prepared to listen; "remembering what we heard last night about the liquor smugglers, it certainly seems likely, doesn't it, that the man who has bought the haunted Brownell house, built a secret radio plant and introduced a radio-controlled airplane into our exclusive neighborhood, may be involved with the smugglers?"

"Righto, Jack," Frank declared. "But what's your proposal?"

"Simply that we do a little investigating on our own account."

"If you intend to propose that we go nosing around the Brownell place, trying to spy and snoop, I vote against it," declared Bob. "I ran away yesterday, after discovering that radio plant, because I felt danger in the air. With a wire fence built to keep out intruders and with New York gunmen posted in the woods, I have a feeling it wouldn't be healthy to do any investigating. If I were tiny as Frank here"—reaching over to rumple his chum's hair—"it might do. They couldn't hit me. But, as it is, I'd make a fine target."

Jack smiled and nodded agreement.

"Agreed on that," he said. "Dad always tells me it is only a foolhardy idiot who puts his head into danger unnecessarily. But that isn't the kind of investigating I had in mind."

"Then what?" asked Frank.

"Well, first of all, this is a fine day for flying," answered Jack, pointing out the open window, to where warm sunshine lay over the country and the sparkling sea in the distance. "You fellows lie abed so long. You haven't had a chance yet to see what an ideal day it is; warm, cloudless, and with hardly a trace of wind."

"What's flying got to do with it?" asked Bob.

"We saw yesterday about all we can see from the air. Any more flying over there will make somebody suspicious."

"I was thinking of a little trip to Mineola," said Jack. "Then we can leave the old bus on the flying field there and motor into the city in an hour. Once in the city we might ask Mr. McKay, your father's real estate friend, who the fellow is who has bought the old Brownell house."

"Then what, Hawkshaw?"

"Oh, Bob, don't be such a grouch," protested Jack. "What if nothing comes of it? We'll have had a good trip, anyhow."

Bob grinned.

"I'm not grouching, Jack," he said. "Only I wanted to see what you had in mind. If it's just a flying trip you're after, well and good. I'm with you. The plane is limbered up since I worked it over, and yesterday's little spin gave me a taste for more, too. But if you are really intent on getting at the bottom of this mystery, I have a proposal, too. What's the matter with our hunting up the Secret Service men? Maybe they would be glad of our tip."

"Good for you, old ice wagon," cried Frank, slapping his chum's broad shoulder.

Jack likewise nodded approval. The previous summer the boys had been instrumental in thwarting

the plots of an international gang on the California coast to smuggle Chinese coolies into the country in violation of the Chinese Exclusion Act. As a consequence, they had made the acquaintance of Inspector Burton of the Secret Service and had even been called to Washington to receive the personal thanks of the Chief for their service and to be introduced to the President. Their adventures during that exciting period are related in "The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty."

"Very good," said Jack, bounding to his feet. "Come on, let's go. It's ten o'clock now. If we hurry, we can cover the sixty miles to Mineola, put up the plane, and be in the city by noon. That will give us two or three hours there, and we can be home easily in time for dinner."

"All right," said Bob. "I'll tell Della where we are going, in case Mother isn't up yet. She had a bad headache, and may be staying in bed. You fellows go down to the hangar, and start getting out the plane. I'll join you right away."

Jack and Frank hurried away, while Bob went to execute his mission. When he rejoined them at the hangar, the plane already was on the skidways.

"You take the wheel going up, Bob," said Frank. "I'll pilot her home."

The trip to Mineola flying field, where Bob and

Frank and Mr. Temple as well had taken their flying lessons, was made without incident. Planning not to arouse the suspicions of anybody who might be on watch, Bob was careful to steer a course over the water a good mile out from Starfish Cove. Watching through the glass, Frank reported the little plane missing and no sign of life on the tiny beach or in the woods beyond where the radio plant was hidden.

Mechanics at the flying field, who knew them, took the plane in charge when they alighted. Although they had planned to hire an automobile to take them into the city, they learned they were in time to catch an express train, and boarded it. After a fast run, they emerged from the train which had borne them through the tunnel under the East River and under Manhattan and ascended to the main waiting room of the Pennsylvania Terminal. The hour still lacked several minutes of noon.

"I'm not particularly hungry," said Jack. "If you fellows feel the same way about it, suppose we defer luncheon until we have seen Mr. McKay. Probably we can catch him at his office now. But if we lunch first, there is no telling when we can get to see him. These business men take three or four hours for lunch lots of times."

"Lead on," said Frank. "Do you know where his office is located?"

"At Times Square," said Bob. "I've been there once with Dad. Come on. We'll take the Subway. It's only one station up the line."

The three boys were familiar with the great city, having lived on Long Island all their lives. Although many miles distant from New York, they were frequent visitors. Crossing the big waiting room, they entered the West Side subway, and a few minutes later disembarked from an express train at the Times Square station. Mounting to the surface, Bob led the way to a towering office building. An express elevator shot them to the twentieth story, and there they entered the anteroom of a handsome suite of offices occupied by the J. B. McKay Realty Corporation, and inquired of the information clerk—a young woman—for the head of the firm. Here, however, they met disappointment. Mr. McKay was not in the city.

"Mr. McKay's secretary is here, however," said the clerk, taking pity on their evident dismay. "Wait a moment and I'll call him."

She spoke into the telephone receiver, and then nodded brightly.

"Mr. Higginbotham will see you," she said. "He is in that corner office."

Jack was undecided. He looked to his companions.

"Shall we try him?"

"May as well," said Frank. "Probably he can give us the information we want, just as well as Mr. McKay."

Following directions, they entered a roomy office, furnished in walnut and with walnut panelling on the walls. Two big windows gave a commanding view up Broadway below and west to the Hudson river and the Jersey shore. A small, sharp-eyed man, with graying hair, immaculately dressed in gray, rose from the desk as they entered and regarded them inquiringly.

Jack wasted no time on preliminaries, but after introducing himself and his companions, stated their mission. They wanted to know who was the man who had bought the old Brownell place, and what was known about him.

His name? Mr. Higginbotham could not recall it. He doubted whether there was a record of it at hand. The old Brownell place? Yes, he remembered the property. Why were the young men interested.

Sharp-eyed Frank detected a slight start at Jack's query. Moreover, he thought there was an air of guarded watchfulness about Higginbotham, for no apparent reason. That mysterious sixth sense which so often had been of value in the past now came to

the fore. Before Jack could reply, he took over the conversation.

"Oh," said he, lightly, "being neighbors, we were just curious, we wondered who had bought the haunted house. That's all. My uncle, Mr. Temple, is a friend of Mr. McKay. So, being near, we thought we would stop in and ask him. That's all. Sorry to have bothered you. Good day."

And taking the bewildered Jack and Bob by their arms, he gently propelled them to the door.

CHAPTER V

PURSUING THE "RADIO" PLANE

NOT before they had reached the street did Frank vouchsafe an explanation of his amazing conduct. Then Jack, refusing to be put aside any more, gripped him by the arm and swung him about so that they stood face to face.

"Out with it, now," he demanded. "Why did you hurry us away from that office? And why didn't you tell Mr. Higginbotham our reason for trying to discover something about this man who has taken the Brownell place?"

Big Bob quizzically regarded his smaller companion.

"Guess I know," he said. "Frank had another hunch. Didn't you?"

"Yes," confessed Frank, "and that's about all I had to go on, too. But it was a strong one. Something inside of me kept saying that man Higginbotham wasn't to be trusted. There was a look in his eyes, watchful and cunning. And he made a

little start when we asked him about the Brownell place. I don't know. There was nothing definite, nothing I can point out to you now. I feel almost ashamed of myself, as a matter of fact."

Bob put an arm over his shoulder.

"You needn't," he said. "Forget it. I'll put my faith in your hunches every time. Well, what'll we do now? Look up the Secret Service men, or have lunch first?"

"Let's eat," said Jack.

He was a bit out of sorts because his plan to pump Mr. McKay had miscarried. Bob who read him aright, grinned and slapped him resoundingly on the back.

"How much money you got, old thing?" he asked. "I came without any. Do we eat at a Child's restaurant or at the Knickerbocker Grill."

They stood on the corner of Broadway and Forty-second street, immediately in front of the Knickerbocker. Toward it Bob, who was fond of good eating, gazed with longing.

"Too high-priced for my purse," said Jack. "Besides, we haven't the time to waste over eating there. Takes too long. We must be on our way. However, I can do you better than a lunch counter, so come on. I know a place around here on Forty-second street."

Taking the lead, Jack led the way through the busy

throng that congests traffic at Times Square at all hours of the day and practically all of the night, too. They turned in at a small restaurant on Forty-second street, and despatched lunch in double-quick time.

During the course of the meal, Bob gave an exclamation.

"I planned to call Dad and tell him we were in town and why," he said. "But it's too late now. He'll have gone out to lunch."

Jack knew it would be impossible to reach his father by telephone. Mr. Hampton the night before had announced he planned to spend the day going over certain engineering plans with Colonel Graham, and Jack had only a vague idea where they would be in conference.

"Now for the Secret Service men," said Jack, at conclusion of the meal. "Luckily I have a card of introduction from Inspector Burton in my purse. Also it gives the address—down on Park Row. Well, the Subway again. Only this time, the East Side branch to Brooklyn Bridge."

Once more stemming the torrent of human traffic flowing along Forty-second street, the boys made their way eastward to the Grand Central station, boarded a southbound express train on the Subway

tracks, and were whisked to their destination at lightning-like speed.

Park Row also was crowded, the noon hour crowds of workers, from the towering skyscrapers of the financial district to the south, loitering in City Hall Park and sauntering up and down the thoroughfare to which the park gives its name. Jack and Bob felt their spirits react to the impulse of the busy life around them, but the sensitive Frank, who hated crowds, became peevish.

He urged his companions to hurry.

"Forget the sight-seeing," he said, "and let's move along. The quicker I'm out of this mass of humanity, the better pleased I'll be. These crowds of New Yorkers don't give a fellow a chance to take a deep breath for fear he'll crush in somebody else's ribs."

"Here we are," said Jack, turning in at a tall office building, near lower Broadway, with old St. Paul's and its churchyard, filled now with loitering clerks spending their dinner hour among the graves, just across the way.

Once more an express elevator whisked the trio skyward. At the fourteenth floor they alighted, made their way to an office, the glass door of which bore no lettering except the number "12," and entered.

"Inspector Condon, please," said Jack, to a fat young man, smoking a long black cigar, who sat in

his shirtsleeves at a desk, reading through a mass of papers.

The latter got to his feet, and held out his hand. He had a jolly face which broke into a grin of welcome, as he extended his hand.

"That's me," he said.

Jack was rather taken aback. He had not expected to meet so young a man in a position of such responsibility. This man could not have been more than 26 or 28 years of age. Passing over his astonishment, however, Jack introduced himself and his companions and then extended the card of introduction given him a year before by Inspector Burton, when they left Washington, but which heretofore had not been presented.

"So," said Inspector Condon, reading the note on the back of the card; "you are the three chaps who made such a stir in that business in California? Mighty glad to meet you. Sit down. What can I do for you?"

"That remains to be seen," said Jack. "However, we have run into something rather curious, and we thought you might be interested. So if you have time to listen, we'll spin the yarn."

"All the time in the world, friend," said Inspector Condon, genially. "Shoot."

Thereupon, Jack proceeded to relate the story of the secret radio plant, the mysterious plane probably controlled by radio and thus able to operate in silence, and the facts as they had obtained them from Mr. Temple regarding the occupant of the old Brownell place known as the "haunted house."

"Ha," said Inspector Condon; "if that fellow is a liquor smuggler, the 'haunted house' has spirits in it, all right, all right."

And he laughed uproariously at his own joke.

"But, now, boys," he added, sobering; "an investigation into this matter would be somewhat outside of my province. However, I'll place this information before the prohibition enforcement officials, who will be glad to get it, I can assure you. Let me thank you, in behalf of the government, for coming to us with your information."

After a few more moments of conversation, during which Inspector Condon made a note of their names and addresses, the boys left.

At the door, Jack turned for a last word.

"If we can be of any help," he said, "call on us. We have a radio plant and an airplane at our command, and, besides, are admirably situated near the scene."

"Fretting for more adventure, are you?" asked Inspector Condon, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Well, that's a kind offer, and I'll pass it along to the proper people to handle this matter. If they need any help, you'll hear from them shortly. I expect they won't let any grass grow under their feet on this case."

When once more they stood on the sidewalk, Jack's gaze lifted to the clock in the tower of St. Paul's. Two o'clock.

"Well, we haven't gotten very far with our adventure," he said, a bit dispiritedly. "I thought we would start something that would give us a bit of excitement. But, apparently, all we have done has been to let the whole business slip out of our hands."

"Oh, forget it," said Frank irritably. The noise, the heat and the bustle of the city had irritated his nerves. "Come on. Let's get out of this. I hate all this hurly-burly. If we take the Subway over to the Flatbush Avenue terminal of the Long Island Railroad, we'll just about have time to make an express to Mineola."

The roar of the Subway was not conducive to conversation, and little further was said until the trio boarded the train in Brooklyn, and pulled out for the short run to Mineola. Early editions of several afternoon newspapers were purchased at the terminal newsstand, and the boys settled down to

glance at the day's happenings when once ensconced in the train.

Presently Frank, his irritation forgotten now that the city was being left behind, called the attention of his companions to a first page story under flaring headlines which read:

RUM RUNNERS LAND
BIG LIQUOR CARGO;
ELUDE "DRY NAVY."

"Say, I haven't been reading any of this stuff," said Frank. "But after what the men told us last night about the size of these operations, and with my interest aroused by developments at Starfish Cove, I'm beginning to see that this defiance of the prohibition law is just about the most stirring thing before the Nation to-day. At least, here on the Eastern seaboard, where these smugglers are organized and have a handy base in the West Indies."

The others nodded agreement, and the conversation proceeded in similar vein until they tumbled from the train at Mineola. Speeding to the flying field in a taxi, they were soon aboard the plane. This time Frank took the wheel. And to the friendly farewells of the mechanics, they took off and began the homeward journey.

After forty minutes of speedy flying, Bob, idly scanning the sky through the glass, focussed upon a tiny speck in the distance. All three had clamped on their radio receivers and hung the transmitters by straps across their shoulders. Speaking into the transmitter now, Bob announced:

"I think that radio-controlled plane is flying away from us, out to sea, off to the right. I'm going to tune up to that 1,375-meter wave length, and we'll see if there's a continuous dash in the receivers."

"All right," answered Jack, "but look out for your eardrums. The interference at that wave length is very sharp and you want to be ready to tune down at once, or your head will feel as if it were ready to burst."

A moment later the high crashing shriek, with which Jack had become familiar of late, signalled in the receivers, and Bob promptly tuned down.

"Wow," said he. "That's it, all right. That's the continuous dash which is being sent out from the secret radio plant to control that little plane. Let's keep it in sight, Frank, and see where it goes. Don't close in on it. Keep just about this distance. I can watch it through the glass, and I'll give you your bearings if you lose sight of it. Probably there is only one man aboard, and he won't have a glass, and won't know we are following him."

"All right," responded Frank. "Here's where we'd turn toward shore. But we'll stick to his trail a while."

With that he began edging the plane out to sea.

CHAPTER VI

A FALL INTO THE SEA

Out over the shining sea flew the glistening all-metal plane, and the spirits of the boys lifted to the chase. The oldest fever of the blood known to man is that of the chase. It comes down to us from our prehistoric ancestors who lived by the chase, got their daily food by it, wooed and won by it, and fought their battles by it in that dim dawn of time when might was right and the law of tooth and claw was the only rede.

Gone was the irritability that had possessed Frank in the noise and din, the crowding walls and swarming hordes of human beings, back in the city. Below him lay the broad Atlantic, from their height seeming smooth as a ball-room floor, with the surface calm and unruffled. No land was in sight ahead. The water stretched to infinity, over the edge of the world. For a wonder, not a sail broke that broad expanse due south, although to the west were several streamers of smoke where ships stood in for port,

hull down on the far horizon, while closer at hand was a little dot which Bob, swinging the glasses, made out to be a four-masted schooner.

It was a long distance off, ten or fifteen miles, judged Bob. The tiny plane was heading in that direction. Was it bearing away for the schooner? The question leaped into Bob's mind. He put it into spoken words, into the transmitter.

"There's a schooner southwest," he said. "The plane is going in that direction. Bear up a trifle, Frank, and slow her down. Let's see whether the plane is heading for it."

Frank slowed the engine and altered the course sufficiently to keep the plane in view on the new tack, but not to bring them so close to it as to arouse suspicion. In a few moments, all could see the tiny speck coasting down on a long slant and Bob, watching through the glasses, exclaimed excitedly:

"The little fellow is going to land. There, he's on the water now. He's taxying close to the ship."

"I'm going to climb," stated Frank, suiting action to word.

"Good idea," said Jack. "Let me have the glasses a minute, Bob, will you?"

Bob complied.

"I don't believe they know of our presence," Jack presently declared. "Do you fellows consider the

plane was forced to land? Is that how it happened to come down near the schooner? There doesn't seem to be any attempt to put out a boat and get the pilot."

"Forced to land, my eye," said Bob, repossessing himself of the glasses. "Do you want to know what I think? I believe the pilot is holding a confab with the schooner. By Jiminy, that's right, too. And it's ended. He's taxying again, and starting to rise."

Frank, at Bob's words, had swung away again to the south. After describing a long circle, which carried them so far aloft and so wide of the ship as to lose it from sight, he again turned the plane toward home.

"I expect they never saw us, either from the schooner or the plane," Jack said. "There was never any indication of alarm. Of course, we were too far off to tell exactly, even spying through the glass."

"Somehow, however," replied Frank. "I have the feeling that they didn't."

"Didn't what?" asked Bob.

"Didn't see us," answered Frank.

Frank had accelerated the speed of the engine, and was driving at eighty miles an hour, straight for home. Suddenly, an exclamation from Bob, who again was swinging his glasses over the sea below, smote the ears of the boys.

"Something's the matter with that little plane. Say"—a breathless pause—"it's falling. Come on, Frank. We'll have to see if we can help. Swoop down. There, to the left."

Rapidly Frank began spiralling and in a very short time was near enough to the small plane for it to be seen clearly with the naked eye. It had been flying at a considerable height. As the boys watched, it went into a dive, with the pilot struggling desperately to flatten out. He succeeded, when not far from the surface of the ocean. As a result, instead of diving nose foremost into the water, the plane fell flat with a resounding smack, there was a breathless moment or two when it seemed as if the little thing would be swamped, then it rode lightly and buoyantly on the little swells.

Descending to the water, Frank taxied up close to the other plane. The figure of the pilot hung motionless over the wheel. Probably, considered the boys, the man had been flung about and buffeted until he lost consciousness.

"I'll close up to him head on," Frank said. "Then, if necessary, one of you can climb into the other plane and see what we can do to help. Probably the thing to do will be to get him aboard here, and carry him ashore."

"Righto," said Bob, climbing out to the fusilage, behind the slowly revolving propeller. "Now take it easy. We don't want to smash. I can drop into the water and swim a stroke or two, and get aboard."

As the boys swung up close, however, the figure at the wheel of the other plane stirred. Then the man lifted his head and looked at them, in dazed fashion.

"Mr. Higginbotham," exclaimed Frank, under his breath. "Well, what do you know about that?"

It was, indeed, the man they had interviewed earlier that day in the McKay realty offices, back in New York.

"How in the world did he get here?" asked Jack, who also had recognized the other.

Frank had brought their plane to a halt. It bobbed up and down slowly on the long ground swell, not far from the smaller machine.

Bob was still astride the fusilage.

"Hello," he called. "We saw you fall and came over to see if we could help. Engine gone wrong, or what was it?"

Higginbotham was rapidly recovering his senses. He stared at his interlocutor keenly, then at the others. Recognition dawned, then dismay, in his eyes. But he cloaked the latter quickly.

"Why, aren't you the lads who were in my office to-day?" he asked, ignoring Bob's proffer of help.

"You're Mr. Higginbotham, aren't you?" answered Bob. "Yes, we are the fellows you spoke to."

"What in the world are you doing out here?" Higginbotham demanded, sharply.

"Why, we told you we lived near here. We had flown to Mineola and then motored to the city. And we were just flying home when we saw you fall, and came over to do what we could."

"Oh."

Higginbotham stared from one to the other. Had he seen them pursue him and spy on him as he visited the schooner? That was the question each boy asked himself. Apparently, he had not done so, for his next question was:

"Do you fly around here often in your plane?"

Frank took a hand in the conversation. If big Bob were left to carry on alone, he might blunderingly give this man an inkling of what the boys knew or suspected about their mysterious neighbors. Frank felt that his chill of suspicion, experienced when he encountered Higginbotham in New York, was being justified. Decidedly, this man must be in with the mysterious inhabitant of the old Brownell place. Equally certain was it that he had lied in stating he did not know the name of the man who had bought the property.

"Oh," said Frank, "we haven't had the plane out

for weeks until a day or two ago, when we made a trial spin, and again to-day. We've been busy for a month overhauling it."

That, thought Frank, ought to stave off Higginbotham's suspicions. Evidently, the other was feeling around to learn whether they had flown sufficiently of late to have spied out the secret radio plant or seen the radio-controlled plane in operation.

"And I'll bet," Frank said himself, "that it is a complete surprise to him to find there is a plane in his neighborhood. Probably, he thought he could operate without fear of discovery in this out-of-the-way neighborhood, and it's a shock to him to find we are here."

Some such thoughts were passing through Higginbotham's mind. How could he get rid of these boys without disclosing to them that his was a radio-controlled plane?

"I'm very much obliged to you, gentlemen," he said, smoothly, "for coming to my aid. As it is, however, I do not need help. This is a plane of my own design, I may as well state, for I can see it's surprising lines have aroused your curiosity. I would prefer that you do not come any closer but that, on the other hand, you would leave me now. I want to make some minor repairs, and then I shall be able to fly again."

"Very well, sir," answered Bob composedly, climbing back from the fusilage to his seat in the pit. "We don't want to annoy you. Good day."

With that, Frank swung clear, the propeller to which Bob had given a twist began anew to revolve, the plane taxied in a circle, then rose and started for the shore.

"We certainly surprised him," chuckled Jack. "He didn't know what to say to us. In his excitement and his fear of discovery of some secret or other, he acted in a way to arouse suspicion, not dispel it. Well, Frank, you win the gold medal. You're hunch about Higginbotham being untrustworthy certainly seems to have some foundation."

"I'll say so, too," agreed Bob. "But what do you imagine happened to him?"

Bob sat with the glasses trained backwards to where the little plane still rode the sea.

"That's easy," answered Jack. "Something went wrong at the secret radio plant and the continuity of the dash which provides the juice for the plane's motor was broken. That's the only way I can figure it. I say. Let's tune up to 1,375 meters, and see whether that continuous dash is sounding."

"It's not there," Bob announced presently. "Not a sound in the receivers. Neither does the plane show any signs of motion. Look here. Suppose

that whatever has happened at that fellow's radio plant cannot be fixed up for a long period, what will Higginbotham do? Ought we to go away and leave him?"

"Well," said Jack, doubtfully, "it does look heartless. He's four or five miles from shore. Of course, we might shoot him a continuous dash from our own radio plant."

"Zowie," shrieked Bob, snatching the receiver from his head, and twisting the controls at the same time, in order to reduce from the 1,375-meter wave length. "There's his power. No need for us to worry now. Oh, boy, but wasn't that a blast in the ear?"

Ruefully, he rubbed his tingling ears. Jack was doing the same. Poor Frank, whose eardrums had been subjected to the same shock, also had taken a hand from the levers at the same time and snatched off his headpiece.

"She's rising now," cried Bob.

Without his headpiece, Frank could not hear the words and kept his eyes to the fore, as he swung now above the line of the shore. Jack, however, also was straining his eyes to the rear, and he snatched the glasses from Bob and trained them on the plane.

True enough, Higginbotham was rising.

CHAPTER VII

A CALL FROM HEADQUARTERS

It was not yet five o'clock when, the airplane safely stowed away and the doors of the hangar closed and locked, the boys once more stood on the skidway.

"What say to a plunge before we go up to the house?" proposed Frank. "There's nobody to see us. We can strip down at the beach, splash around for ten minutes, and then head home. It's a hot, sticky day and that trip to the city left me with the feeling that I wanted to wash something away."

The others agreed to the proposal and they started making their way to the shore, discussing the latest turn of events on the way.

"It certainly looks as if your hunch about Higginbotham, when we met him in his office, was justified," said Jack, clapping Frank on the shoulder.

"The boy's a wonder," agreed Bob. Then, more seriously, he added:

"But, I say. Higginbotham isn't the man who flew the radio-controlled plane before. I mean the fellow whose tracks I found in the sand. That chap was peg-legged."

"That's right," agreed Jack. "And where does Higginbotham figure in this matter, anyhow? It's some mystery."

"Well, let's see what we do know so far," suggested Frank. "It's little enough that we have found out. But I like mysteries. First of all, Bob finds a secret radio plant, and ——"

"No," interrupted Jack. "First of all, I discover interference in the receivers at a 1,375-meter wave length."

"Yes, that's right," said Frank. "Well, second is Bob's find of the radio plant to which he is led by tracks in the sand made by a peg-legged man. Look here. Bob thought at the time that man had arrived in a boat. He saw marks on the sand indicating a boat had been pulled up on the shore. Might not that have been the indentation made by the radio plane?

"Just what I was thinking to myself a minute ago," said Bob.

"Anyhow," continued Frank, "we then discovered the radio plane in Starfish Cove. From Uncle George we learned a mysterious stranger had recently bought

the Brownell place, the 'haunted house,' and had built a fence about the property and set armed guards to keep out intruders. The plot was thickening all the time."

By now the boys had reached the shore and well above the tide mark they began to strip, dropping their clothes in heaps. Frank continued talking as he shed his garments:

"So we decided to go up to the city and ask Mr. McKay who it was had taken the Brownell place. Instead of Mr. McKay we found his secretary, Higginbotham, who professed to know nothing about the matter. Yet, when we arrive down here, we find Higginbotham in the radio plane, visiting a schooner well off shore.

"Say, fellows," he added, as having dropped the last article of clothing, he stood prepared to plunge in; "that man Higginbotham must have left his office immediately after we interviewed him, and probably came down by motor car. We spent two or three hours longer in the city, which gave him the chance to beat us. Now what brought him down here?"

"Search me," said Bob. "There may be a big liquor plot, and he may be in it. Probably, is. Perhaps he was alarmed at our inquiries and hurried down to keep things quiet for a while."

"That's just what he did, Bob, I do believe," said Jack, approvingly. "I believe you've hit it."

"Oh, well, come on," said Bob. "Let's have this plunge."

Scooping up two handsful of wet sand he flung it at his companions. Then the fight began.

Forty-five minutes later, as they strolled across the lawn of the Temple home, Della came running to join them from the tennis court where she was playing with a girl visitor.

"Where have you been?" she cried. "Some man has been calling for the three of you on the telephone. Two or three times in the last hour."

"Calling for us, Sis?" said Bob. "Who is he?"

"I don't know," she said. "He hasn't given his name. I believe he's calling from New York."

The boys looked at each other, puzzled. Who could it be?

"Oh, there's Mary again," said Della, pointing to a maid who at that moment emerged on the side veranda, overlooking the tennis court.

"Mister Robert, you're wanted on the telephone," came the maid's voice.

Bob hurried indoors. Jack at his heels. Frank hung behind.

"Well, Mr. Frank Merrick," said Della pertly. "Give an account of yourself, if you please. What

were you boys doing in the city to-day? You think you're grand, don't you, to go flying off in your airplane, on the very day I invite a girl down here to meet you?"

"Is she good looking, Della?" asked Frank, anxiously. I won't meet her if she isn't good looking."

Della realized he was merely teasing, but she made a cruel thrust in return.

"You don't expect a good looking girl to be interested in you, do you?" she said.

Frank laughed, then reached out to seize her by the shoulders, but she eluded his grasp and went speeding off across the lawn with him in pursuit. They reached the tennis court, laughing and flushed, Della still in the lead. There Della beckoned the other girl to them, and managed introductions.

"This is that scatter-brained Frank Merrick, I told you about, Pete," she said. "Frank, this is my own particular pal at Miss Sefton's School, Marjorie Faulkner, better known as Pete. If you can beat her at tennis, you will have to play above your usual form."

"That so?" said Frank, entering into the spirit of badinage. "Give me a racquet, and I'll take you both on for a set. About 6-0 ought to be right, with me on the large end. Never saw a girl yet that could play passable tennis."

"You scalawag," laughed Della. "When it was only my playing that enabled us to beat Bob and Jack last light. Well, here's your racquet, all waiting for you. Come on."

Della was a prophet. The slender, lithe Miss Faulkner, with her tip-tilted nose, freckles, tan and all, proved to be almost as good a player as Della herself. The result was that, although both games were hotly contested, Frank lost the first two of the set. He was about to start serving for the third game, when Bob and Jack, giving evidences of considerable excitement, approached from the house.

"Hey, Frank, come here," called Bob.

Frank stood undecided, but Della called to her brother:

"He's a very busy boy, Bob. You and Jack better come and help him."

Noting the presence of the other girl, Bob and Jack came forward, whereupon Della once more managed introductions. Bob, usually rather embarrassed in the presence of girls, seemed at once at ease, and apparently forgot entirely his urgent business with Frank. He and Miss Faulkner fell into the gay chatter from which the others were excluded. Jack seized the opportunity to pull Frank aside.

"Look here," he said. "Something has happened already. That call was from one of the gov-

ernment prohibition enforcement agents up in New York. He said Inspector Condon had carried our information and surmises about our neighbors to him immediately after seeing us. He's coming down to-night to the house. Said he thought he could make the trip in about three hours, and would be here at 9 o'clock."

"Is that so?" said Frank. "Has Uncle George come home yet?"

"No, and he won't be home. It seems he telephoned earlier that he was running down to Philadelphia on business for a day or two. He always keeps a grip packed at his office, you know, for such emergencies."

Frank nodded, then looked thoughtful.

"He ought to be here, however," he said. "Well, anyway, there's your father."

Jack shook his head.

"No, Dad planned to stay in town to-night at his club."

"Well," said Frank. "We'll have to handle this alone. I suppose, however, this man just wants to talk with us at first hand and, perhaps, by staying until to-morrow, get an idea of what's down here for himself. He might even ask us to take him up in the plane over the Brownell place, to-morrow."

"What did Bob say to him?"

"Told him to come on down," said Jack. "What else could he say? We had told Inspector Condon that we placed ourselves at the government's service. I expect I had better put him up at our house overnight. Then we won't have to make any useless explanations to Mrs. Temple."

Frank nodded. Mrs. Temple, though kindly soul enough, was so involved in social and club duties that she had little time to give the boys. As a matter of fact, Frank was not at all certain that she would be at home for dinner that night. As to putting up the stranger at Jack's home, that would be an easy matter. Jack's mother was dead, and a housekeeper managed the house and servants for himself and his father. She was an amiable woman, and all Jack would have to do would be to prefer a request that a guest room be prepared, and it would be done.

"Hey, Frank," called Bob, interrupting their aside; "see how this strikes you? Miss Faulkner and I will play you and Della. We shall have time for a set before dressing for dinner."

"Righto," agreed Frank, taking up his racquet, while Jack sank to the turf bordering the court, to look on.

Bob really outplayed himself, and several times, when he approached Della, Frank whispered to her that her brother was smitten and trying to "show

off" before the new girl. Della, well pleased, nodded agreement. Nevertheless, Frank and Della played their best, and the score stood at three-all when Jack hailed them from the sidelines with the information that, unless they preferred being late to dinner, it behooved them to quit playing and hasten indoors. Dinner at the Temples was served promptly at 7 o'clock, and never delayed. Accordingly, the game was broken up.

"Come along, Jack," said Frank, linking an arm in that of his pal; "your father's not at home, and we won't let you dine in solitary splendor. You are coming to dinner with us."

CHAPTER VIII

A CONSULTATION

"THIS man Higginbotham is not the chief figure in the liquor smuggling ring," stated Captain Folsom emphatically.

Captain Folsom sat in the Temple library, with the boys grouped about him. The time was nearing ten o'clock. From the moment of his arrival, shortly after the hour of nine, he had been in conference with the boys, and they had explained to him in detail all that they had discovered or surmised about their neighbors of the old Brownell place.

An army officer with a distinguished record, who had lost his left arm in the Argonne, Captain Folsom upon recovery had been given a responsible post in the prohibition enforcement forces. His was a roving commission. He was not attached permanently to the New York office, but when violations of the law at the metropolis became so flagrant as to demand especial attention, he had been sent on from Washington to assume command of a special squad

of agents. Lieutenant Summers, U. S. N., in command of the submarine division known as the "Dry Fleet," was operating in conjunction with him, he had told the boys.

Still a young man in his early thirties, he had a strong face, an athletic frame and a true grey eye, and had made a good impression on the boys.

"No," he repeated emphatically, "this man Higginbotham is not at the bottom of all this devilment. There is somebody behind it all who is keeping utterly in the dark, somebody who is manipulating all the various bands of smugglers around this part of the world. I believe that when we unearth him we shall receive the surprise of our lives, for undoubtedly, from certain evidences that have come to my attention so far, he will prove to be a man of prominence and importance in the business world."

"But why should such a man engage in liquor smuggling?" asked Jack, astonished.

Captain Folsom smiled.

"My dear boy," he said, "wherever 'big money,' so to speak, is involved, you will find men doing things you would never have suspected they were capable of. And certainly, 'big money' is involved in bootlegging, as liquor smuggling is termed.

"Evidently, you boys have not been interested in watching developments in this situation, since the

country became 'dry.' Well, it's a long story, and I won't spin out the details. But, as soon as the prohibition law went into effect, in every city in the country bootleggers sprang up. Many, of course, were of the lawless type that are always engaged in breaking the laws. Others, however, were people who ordinarily would not be regarded as law-violators. In this case, though, they felt that an injustice had been done, that human liberty had been violated, in the foisting of prohibition on the country. They felt it was a matter the individual should be permitted to decide for himself, whether he should take a drink of liquor or not, you know.

"These people, therefore, did not regard it as a crime to break the law.

"Another salve to conscience, moreover, was the fact that tremendous sums of money were to be made out of bootlegging. Liquor was selling for prices that were simply enormous. It still is, of course, but I am speaking about the beginnings of things. People who never had drunk liquor in any quantities before, now would buy a case of whiskey or wine, and pay $100 a case and up for it, and consider themselves lucky to get it. They would boast quietly to friends about having obtained a case of liquor.

"The bootlegging industry, accordingly, has grown to astonishing proportions to-day. Right in New

York City are men who are rated as millionaires, who a few years ago did not have a penny, and they have acquired their money through liquor smuggling.

"At first these bootleggers operated individually, and elsewhere in the Nation that is still largely their method. But here in New York there have been increasing evidences lately that some organizing genius had taken charge of the situation and was swiftly bending other bootleggers to his will. For some time, we have been of the opinion that a syndicate or ring, probably controlled and directed by one man, was responsible for most of the liquor smuggling here."

"And do you believe," interrupted Frank, "that this man who has bought the old Brownell place may be that central figure?"

Captain Folsom nodded.

"It is entirely possible," he said. "Moreover, what you have told me about the construction of a secret radio plant, and about the appearance of this radio-controlled airplane, fits in with certain other facts which have puzzled us a good deal lately."

"How so?" asked Jack.

"For one thing," said Captain Folsom, "my colleague, Lieutenant Summers of the submarine division, tells me that his radio receivers aboard the boats of his fleet have picked up any number of mysterious series of dots and dashes lately. Code

experts have been working on them, but they have proved meaningless.

"He was puzzled by them. He still is puzzled. But, we have noticed that after every such flooding of the ether with these dots and dashes, a shipment of liquor has appeared on the market. And one theory advanced is that the liquor was landed along the coast of Long Island or New Jersey in boats controlled by radio from a powerful land station. The boats, of course, according to this theory, were launched from some liquor-laden vessel which had arrived off the coast from the West Indies. Radio-driven boats, automobiles or planes, Lieutenant Summers tells me, are directed by a series of dots and dashes. So you see, our theory sounds plausible enough, and, if it is correct, the direction probably has come from this secret radio station."

Big Bob's brow was wrinkled in thought. He seldom spoke, but usually when he did so, it was to the point.

"In that case," he asked, "what would be the necessity for this radio-driven airplane? Apparently, the airplane is for communication from ship to shore. But, with a radio land station, why can't such communications be carried on by radio in code?"

Captain Folsom looked thoughtful.

"There is something in that," he said.

"Perhaps, these plotters are playing safe," suggested Frank. "They may figure that code would be intercepted and interpreted. Therefore, they confine their use of radio to the transmission of power waves, and do not employ it for sending messages. The airplane is the messenger."

Jack nodded approvingly.

"Yes," he agreed, "Frank's idea is a good one. Besides, by using a radio-controlled plane, the plotters can scout over the surrounding waters for miles whenever a ship is about to land a cargo. The plane can make a scouting expedition over the shore, too, for that matter. You see a radio-controlled plane has an immense advantage for such scout work, inasmuch as it proceeds practically without noise."

Captain Folsom slapped his knee resoundingly with an open palm.

"By George," he cried, "I believe you boys have hit it. This scout plane is the answer to what has puzzled us the last few weeks. We know liquor is being landed somewhere from ships, but despite our best efforts both ashore and on the water, we have been unable to run down the smuggling ships or the receiving parties ashore. Well, this plane warns the ships away from the vicinity of the sub chasers, and also directs the landing of the radio-controlled boats with their cargo at lonely spots where there are no

guards. Yes, sir, I believe that is the way it has been worked."

He fell silent, and sat with brow wrinkled in concentrated thought. The boys respected his silence, and also were busied with their own thoughts.

"There is one thing that has got to be done," said Captain Folsom, presently.

There was a gleam of determination in his eye.

"You mean the radio-controlled plane must be put out of commission?" asked Frank quickly.

"You have read my thought," accused Captain Folsom. "Yes, that is just what I was going to suggest. But how to do it, with no evidence against Higginbotham or this mysterious individual living at the Brownell house, is beyond me."

"Jack's a shark at the use of radio," declared Bob. "Perhaps he can suggest some method."

All turned toward Jack.

"It wouldn't do, of course, to make a raid and capture the plane and their radio plant?" Jack asked.

Captain Folsom shook his head.

"No," he said. "That wouldn't do, for a number of reasons. In the first place, as I said, we have no evidence that would stand in court that Higginbotham or anybody else connected with the matter is a law-breaker. It may even be that whoever is behind the plot has obtained a government license

for the operation of the radio station. The power of these bootleggers reaches far, and goes into high places. Therefore, we cannot afford to make an open attack.

"But, in the second place," he added, leaning forward and uncrossing his legs; "what good would that do? It would only warn the Man Higher Up that we were on his track. We don't want him warned. We want to close in on him. For I do believe you boys have given us a lead that will enable us to do so. At the same time—we do want to put that plane out of commission."

"Look here," said Jack, suddenly. "It's strange, if with our airplane and our own radio plant, one of the most powerful private plants in the world, certainly in America, it's strange, I say, if with this equipment we are not enabled to work out some method for accomplishing your ends.

"But, let's think it over. Let's sleep on it. I have the glimmerings of an idea now. But I'm tired. It's been a hard day. Suppose we all turn in and talk it over to-morrow morning."

"Good idea, Jack," declared Bob, yawning unrestrainedly. "I'm tired, too."

"Very good," said Captain Folsom. "Meanwhile, I shall have to take advantage of your kind offer to put me up for the night."

"No trouble at all," said Jack, heartily. "Come along. Night, fellows. Come over to my house after breakfast. Night."

With mutual farewells the party broke up, Frank and Bob retiring to their rooms, and Jack and his guest starting to make their way to the Hampton home. On the part of none of them was there any prevision of the strange events the night would bring forth.

CHAPTER IX

THE ENEMY STRIKES

In the middle of the night, Jack awoke with a start, and lay silent a moment, listening, wondering what had aroused him. The next moment he heard a cry outside his window of "Jack, Jack, wake up."

It was Frank's voice. Leaping from bed, Jack sprang to the upflung window overlooking the side lawn nearest the Temple house. Outside in the moonlight stood Frank, a pair of trousers pulled over his pajamas, hands cupped to his mouth. He was preparing to yell again.

"What's the matter?" called Jack.

"The hangar's afire. Tom Barnum saw the blaze from your radio station and called the house. I'm off. Come as fast as you can."

Turning, Frank plunged away toward the airplane hangar, clutching at his trousers as he ran. Jack could not help laughing a little at the ridiculous spectacle which his chum provided. Then he turned back to the room and started feverishly to dress, ignoring

everything except trousers, shirt and shoes. While he was thus engaged, the voice of Captain Folsom hailed him sleepily from next room.

"You up, old man? Thought I heard voices. Anything the matter?"

"Yes, there is," replied Jack, going to the communicating door. "Tom Barnum, the mechanic-watchman in charge of our radio plant, which isn't far from the Temples' airplane hangar, says the latter is afire. Frank and Bob already are on the way down, and stopped to warn me."

"Afire?" cried Captain Folsom, leaping from his bed, and reaching for his trousers. "That's bad. Just when we need the airplane, too, to spy on these rascals. Half a minute, old man, and I'll be with you. Not so devilish easy to get into trousers with one arm."

"Can I help you," proffered Jack. "I'm all fixed. Here, let me lace your shoes."

"Well, if you insist," said Captain Folsom.

As Jack deftly laced up the other's shoes, he said in an anxious tone:

"Do you think, sir, those people set the fire? It would be a catastrophe if the plane burned just at this particular time, wouldn't it? There. All ready."

"Mighty good of you," said Captain Folsom. "Lead on, then, and I'll follow. As to the fire, I'll re-

serve opinion until I get the facts. But these liquor smugglers are unscrupulous, and if they feared the airplane was being used against them, they would have no compunctions about burning it."

From the side of the house on which their rooms were located, Jack and his guest were unable to see anything of the fire, as the hangar lay in an opposite direction. But the moment they emerged outdoors, the blaze showed dully against the sky above an intervening grove of trees.

Without wasting breath in further speculation, Jack and Captain Folsom started running for the scene. The hangar stood a considerable distance away, and so fast had they covered the ground that they arrived pretty well blown.

They found the airplane standing like a singed bird on the sands in front of the hangar, and gathered about were Frank and Bob, Tom Barnum, and Old Davey, Mr. Hampton's gardener.

"The wings are gone, Jack," said Bob, turning as his chum approached. "But, thanks to Tom's rapid work with the extinguisher, the fire did not reach the tank, and the old bus will be able to fly again after she sprouts new wings."

Jack turned his gaze to the hangar. The sides and roof were of corrugated iron. Practically the only

wood in the construction was that employed in the skidway. It needed only a glance to tell him the latter had been torn up and piled inside the hangar where it was still smouldering.

"What happened?" he asked.

There were excited answers from all, but presently the story was made clear. Some miscreant apparently had forced open the doors of the hangar, torn up the wooden planks and flooring of the skidway, piled them inside and then set them afire. Probably whoever was guilty employed this method in order to give himself time to escape before the fire should attract attention. He had overlooked, however, the presence of a large tank of chemicals with which to fight fire stored at the rear of the hangar, and Tom Barnum, after telephoning the Temple home, had appeared so quickly at the hangar that, by employing the chemical extinguisher, he had managed to save the airplane from being blown up. Old Davey, a light sleeper, had hurried over from his cottage and the pair were in the act of pushing apart the burning brands in order to wheel out the plane, when Bob and Frank arrived to help them.

"Et's mighty cur'ous," said Old Davey, shaking his head dolefully; "mighty cur'ous, the trouble you boys hev with thet airyplane. D'ye think now et was them Mexicans comin' back?"

"No, Davey," said Jack. "Not this time. Some other set of rascals was responsible."

"What does he mean, may I ask?" inquired Captain Folsom, his curiosity aroused.

Briefly, Jack related to him how the previous summer two representatives of a faction of Mexican bandits engaged in making war on a group of independent oil operators headed by his father in New Mexico, had appeared at the quiet Long Island home, stolen the airplane, and flown with it to Old Mexico where they had employed it in kidnaping Mr. Hampton. The boys, said Jack, not only had effected Mr. Hampton's release but also had recovered the plane, as related in "The Radio Boys On The Mexican Border."

"It's too long a story to be told now, however," he concluded, after giving the above bare outline. "Some other time I'll give you the details if you are interested."

"I certainly am interested," said Captain Folsom, regarding Jack with increased respect. "To think of you boys having done all that!"

"Oh, it was fun," said Jack hastily, embarrassed by the other's praise. "Come on, let's see what the fellows are doing."

The others proved to be engaged in spraying the last of the chemical on the expiring embers of the

blaze, and in stamping and beating out the last of the fire. As the light died out, Bob fumbled for and found the switch in the hangar and the electric lights sprang on.

"Whoever did this made a hurried job of it," said he. "I wonder——"

"What?" asked Jack.

"Oh, I was just wondering why the job was left uncompleted? Tom," he added, turning to Tom Barnum; "how big was the blaze when you saw it?"

"Nothin' much," answered the other, his round, good-natured face shining through a fog of pipe smoke. "I was restless. Somethin' I et for dinner, I guess. So I got up to smoke a pipe an' stroll around outside the station a bit, to see if I couldn't get myself sleepy. My room's back o' the power house, ye know. Well, as I come outside I see a light over here. Not much bigger than a flashlight. But it was 2 o'clock in the mornin' an' I knew none o' you could be there. So I thinks either that's fire or some rascal, an' telephoned you, then hustled over here."

"That's it," said Bob. "That explains it. I was wondering why whoever set this fire didn't make a more complete job of it, but I see now. You probably scared him away."

"Might be," said Tom. "He might a heard me callin' to Old Davey as I run past his cottage."

"Well," said Frank, "let's push the bus inside. She's not much good till we get new wings, but we don't want to leave it out here all night."

All lent a hand, and then as he started to swing shut the doors Bob examined the lock and gave an exclamation.

"Not even broken open,"he said, disgustedly. "I must have forgotten to lock up when we left. Good night."

This time, he fastened the lock, and then fell in with his comrades and the party started for their homes.

"Whoever did that wasn't far away," Captain Folsom said, thoughtfully. "If we had made a search we might have gotten some trace of him. But it is too late now. I imagine, of course, as I said to Mr. Hampton here earlier, that our bootlegger friends set the fire. When they discovered your airplane in their neighborhood, they feared it would interfere with their plans and decided to get rid of it."

"Well, they got rid of it, all right," said Bob, "for to-night, anyhow, as well as for some time come."

They proceeded in gloomy silence for the most part, although the voice of Old Davey, an incorrigible conversationalist, floated back to them from where he led the way with Tom Barnum. Where

their courses diverged, the pair waited for them to call "Good nights."

"I say," said Jack suddenly, to his companions as Tom and Old Davey departed; "I have an idea. Let's go over to the radio station, just for luck, and listen in on the ether to see whether we can pick up the interference on the 1,375-meter wave length. Maybe, we can get some of those dots and dashes, too, of which Captain Folsom spoke. It's only a step or two out of our way."

Bob yawned sleepily but stumbled ahead for the station, without a word, and Frank fell in with him. Jack called to Tom Barnum and ran ahead, leaving Captain Folsom to proceed with his chums.

When the others arrived, the door of the station's transmitting room stood open, the lights were turned on, and Jack already was seated at the instrument table, a headpiece clamping the receivers to his ears while he manipulated the tuner.

Bob slumped down on the outside step, and Frank took a seat beside him, with an arm flung over his shoulders. The damage to their airplane was felt keenly by both. Captain Folsom, with a pitying glance at them, entered the station.

"Put on that headpiece," said Jack, motioning.

The other complied.

"By George," he cried, a moment later.

CHAPTER X

A NIGHT EXPEDITION

For several minutes Jack and Captain Folsom listened with strained attention while through the receivers came to their ears a series of dots and dashes which to one corresponded exactly with the similar sounds picked up by the prohibition enforcement officials on other occasions, and which to the other were meaningless and, therefore, significant.

That statement is not difficult to explain. Jack was familiar with the Morse and Continental codes. What he heard in the receivers represented neither. Therefore, either the station he had picked up and was listening-in on was sending in some mysterious code or, as was more likely, it was radiating control. And, all things considered, the latter was the more likely supposition.

Meanwhile, Bob and Frank, unaware of what was forward, sat disconsolately on the stoop outside in the warm night air, glooming over the damage to their airplane.

Finally Captain Folsom took off the headpiece and, seeing that Jack had done likewise, turned to him with an air of exasperation.

"This is maddening," he declared to Jack. "Evidently, if I know anything about it, the smugglers are landing liquor somewhere along the coast by means of a radio-controlled boat or boats."

Jack was thoughtful.

"Do you know what I think?" he asked. "I believe they are landing the liquor somewhere near us. For one thing, the sounds in the receivers are very clear and distinct. That, however, does not portend a great deal. The night is exceptionally good for sending, clear and with practically no static. But there is another thing to be considered, and it's that I have in mind."

"What do you mean?" asked Captain Folsom.

"I am thinking of the attempt to destroy the airplane, and the probable reason for it."

"Hm."

"You see," continued Jack, "if the smugglers planned to operate to-night, and were made fearful by recent events that we either had learned anything about them or suspected them, they might decide it would be unwise to have us at large, so to speak. Suppose we were to swoop down on them in our airplane, they might think, what then? This man Hig-

ginbotham, now. He might not have been deceived by our explanation of how we came to be on hand when he was flying in his radio-controlled plane and fell into the water. Besides, and this is the biggest point of all, we had appeared at his office to try and find out who had bought the Brownell property. Oh, the more I consider it, the more I realize that he could not help but suspect that we were on the track of the liquor smugglers."

Captain Folsom nodded.

"Sound sense, all of it," he declared; "especially, your deduction that they are landing liquor near us. Look here," he added, with sudden resolution; "where does that man, Tom Barnum, sleep?"

"He has quarters opening from the power house here," said Jack, in a tone of surprise. "Why, may I ask?"

"Well, I think so well of your supposition that I want to do a bit of investigating. Barnum looks like a stout, reliant man. Besides, he knows the neighborhood. I'll ask him to accompany me."

Jack's eyes glittered.

"What's the matter with us?" he demanded.

"Oh, I couldn't think of drawing you boys into this. It might involve some little danger."

"Well," said Jack, "danger would be nothing new to us. If you do not actually forbid our accompany-

ing you, we'll go along. I'm keen to go. And I can say the same for Bob and Frank without questioning them. Besides, you must remember it was their airplane which these rascals damaged. They'll be eager for a chance to even scores."

Captain Folsom still looked dubious.

"You are unarmed," he objected. "And we might, just might, you know, stumble into a situation where we would need to protect ourselves."

"Oh, if that's all that stands in your way," said Jack, rising, "you need not worry. Tom Barnum keeps a whole armory of weapons here. He has at least a half dozen pistols and automatics. As for us, we are all pretty fair shots and used to handling weapons. Now, look here, Captain Folsom," he said, pleadingly, advancing and laying a hand on the other's arm; "I know what you are saying to yourself. You are saying how foolish it would be for you to encumber yourself with three harum-scarum boys. But that is where you make a mistake. We have been through a lot of dangerous situations, all three of us and, I can tell you, we have been forced to learn to keep our wits about us. I can promise you that we would not be a hindrance."

Captain Folsom's face cleared.

"Good," said he, heartily; "spoken like a man. I'll be only too glad to have you fellows."

"We'll take Tom Barnum, too," said Jack. "He can be relied on in any crisis. Wait here until I stir him up and tell the boys."

Leaving the other, Jack went outside and apprised his chums of the new plan. It was just the thing they needed to rouse them from the despondency into which contemplation of the damage to their airplane had thrown them. Then he went to Tom Barnum's quarters. Tom had not yet returned to sleep. He was eager to join in the adventure. Bringing three or four pistols, Jack and Tom quickly rejoined the party.

"What is your idea, Captain Folsom?" Jack inquired, when all were ready to depart and everything had been made tight about the station.

"First of all, how far is it to Starfish Cove?"

"Between two and three miles," answered Bob. "But the tide is out, and we shall have good going on the hard sand, and ought to make it under forced draught in a half hour or a little more."

"Is there any other place where small boats might land conveniently, any other place reasonably near?"

The boys and Tom Barnum shook their heads.

"That's far and away the best place," said Jack.

"Well, then, I propose that we make our way close to the Cove, and then take to the cover of the

trees, which you have given me to understand, come down there close to the water."

"They fringe the beach," Bob explained.

"Good. With reasonable care we ought to be able to make our way undiscovered close enough to see what is going on, supposing a landing such as I have in mind is taking place."

"There's armed guards on the Brownell place nowadays," interjected Tom Barnum, to whom Jack had given a brief explanation of things. "Maybe, them fellers have sentries posted."

"Well, we'll have to exercise caution when we get close to the Cove," said Captain Folsom. "And now, if we are all ready, let us start. Every second's delay is so much time lost. They'll be working fast. If we are to gain any information, we must hasten about it."

"Righto," said Bob, striding off. "And just let me get my hands on the sneak that tried to burn the airplane," he added, vindictively. "I'll give that gentleman a remembrance or two of the occasion."

The others fell in, and with long strides started making their way along the sand left hard-packed by the receding tide, under the moonlight.

Bob set a terrific pace but, fortunately, all members of the party were young men and accustomed to physical exercise, and none found it any hardship

to keep up with their pacemaker. On the contrary, three at least enjoyed the expedition and found their spirits uplifted by the zest of this unexpected adventure undertaken at 2 o'clock in the morning.

When they drew near the first of the two horns enclosing the little bay known as Starfish Cove, Bob pulled up, and the others came to a halt around him.

"Just ahead there," said Bob, pointing, and addressing Captain Folsom, "lies our destination. I expect it would not be wise to make our way any farther along the sands."

Captain Folsom nodded.

"Right. We'll take to those trees up yonder. I'll go first with Jack." Unconsciously, he had taken to addressing the boys by their given names. "Do you others keep close behind."

In this order they started making their way through the grove, just inside the outer belt of trees. The moonlight was bright on the water and the sands, and illuminated the aisles of the grove in fairylike fashion.

"Keep low and take advantage of cover," whispered Captain Folsom, as he saw how the matter stood. And crouching and darting from tree to tree, they worked their way forward until a low exclamation from Jack halted his companion who was a bit behind him. The others came up.

"Fence," whispered Jack, succinctly.

Sure enough. There it was, just ahead, a high wire fence, the strands barbed and strung taut on steel poles.

"We can't see the Cove yet from here," whispered Jack. "Our first glimpse of it won't come until we move forward a bit farther. We'll either have to try to climb over this or go out on the beach to get around it. It doesn't go down to the water, does it, Bob?"

"No, and I didn't see it when I was here several days ago," Bob replied in a low voice. "I suppose it must have been here then, but I didn't see it. There was no fence on the beach, and I was following the water's edge."

"There's a big tree close to it," said Frank, pointing. "And, look. There's a limb projects over the fence. We might shin up the tree and out on that limb and drop."

"I'm afraid I couldn't do it," said Captain Folsom, simply. "This arm ——"

"Oh, I forgot," said the sensitive Frank, with quick compunction, silently reproaching himself for thus reminding the other of his loss.

"I'm not sensitive," said Captain Folsom, and added grimly: "Besides, the German that took it, paid with his life."

There was an awkward silence.

"Anyhow," said Jack, breaking it, "it would be ticklish work for any of us to get over that fence by climbing the tree. The fence is a good ten feet high, and the strands of barbed wire curve forward at the top. That limb, besides, is twelve feet or more from the ground, and not very strong, either. It looks as if we would have to make our way around the fence and out on the beach."

"Let's go, then," said Bob, impatiently. "Now that I'm here I want a look at Starfish Cove. I have one of Frank's hunches that there is something doing there."

He started moving forward toward the edge of the grove, which here was out of sight, being some distance away, as Jack had led the way well within the shelter of the trees because of the radiance cast by the moon.

"Wait, Bob, wait," whispered Frank, suddenly, in a tense voice, and he restrained his companion. "I heard something."

All crouched down, listening with strained attention.

In a moment the sound of voices engaged in low conversation came to their ears, and a moment later two forms appeared on the opposite side of the fence, moving in their direction.

CHAPTER XI

PRISONERS

"I HEARD a fellow shouting and beat it, or I'd'a done a better job. Anyhow, that's one plane won't be able to fly for a while."

One of the two men dropped this remark as the pair, engrossed in conversation, passed abreast of the party on the outside of the boundary fence and not ten feet from them. The speaker was a short, broad, powerfully built man in appearance, and he spoke in a harsh voice and with a twang that marked him as a ruffian of the city slums. He wore a cap, pulled so low over his features as to make them indistinguishable. And he walked with a peg leg!

The moonlight was full on the face of the other, and the boys recognized him as Higginbotham. There was an angry growl from Bob, farthest along the line toward the beach, which he quickly smothered. Apparently, it did not attract attention, for Higginbotham and his companion continued on their way oblivious to the proximity of the others.

"The young hounds," said Higginbotham, in his cultivated, rather high voice. And he spoke with some heat. "This will teach them a lesson not to go prying into other people's business."

The other man made some reply, but it was indistinguishable to those in hiding, and the precious pair proceeded on their way, now out of earshot. But enough had been overheard. It was plain now, if it had not been before, where lay the guilt for the attempt to destroy the airplane. Plain, too, was the fact that Higginbotham was engaged in some nefarious enterprise.

For several seconds longer, after Higginbotham and his companion had gotten beyond earshot and were lost to view among the trees, Jack remained quiet but inwardly a-boil. Then he turned to Captain Folsom and Tom Barnum, crouching beside him.

"What an outrage," he whispered, indignantly. "Poor Bob and Frank. To have their airplane damaged just because that scoundrel thought we were prying into his dirty secrets. I wish I had my hands on him."

Suddenly his tone took on a note of alarm.

"Why, where are Bob and Frank?" he demanded. "They were here a moment ago."

He stared about him in bewilderment. The others

did likewise. But the two mentioned could not be seen. With an exclamation, Jack rose to his feet.

"Come on," he urged. "I'll bet Bob decided to go for the fellow who burned his plane and take it out of his hide. When that boy gets angry, he wants action."

He started striding hastily down toward the beach, alongside the wire fencing. The others pressed at his heels. Presently, they caught the glint of water through the trees, and then, some distance ahead, caught sight of two figures moving out from the grove onto the sands on the opposite side of the fence. Jack increased his pace, but even as he did so two other figures stole from the woods on the heels of the first pair.

Involuntarily, Jack cried out. The second pair leaped upon the backs of the first and bore them to the ground. The next moment, the air was filled with curses, and the four figures rolled on the sands.

"Come on, fellows," cried Jack, breaking into a run, and dashed ahead.

He broke from the trees and discovered the boundary fence came to an abrupt end at the edge of the grove. It was here Bob and Frank, he felt sure, had made their way and leaped on Higginbotham and the thug. For so he interpreted what he had seen.

As he came up the fight ended. It had been bitter but short. Frank was astride Higginbotham and pressing his opponent's face into the sand to smother his outcries. Bob had wrapped his arms and legs about the city ruffian and the latter, whose curses had split the air, lay face uppermost, his features showing contorted in the moonlight. Bob knelt upon him. As Jack ran up, he was saying:

"You want to be careful whose airplane you burn."

An exclamation from Captain Folsom drew Jack's attention from the figures in the immediate foreground, and raising his eyes he gazed in the direction in which the other was pointing. Some fifty yards away, on the edge of Starfish Cove, a half dozen objects of strange shape and design were drawn up on the sand. They were long, shaped somewhat like torpedoes and gleamed wet in the moonlight.

Not a soul was in sight. The moonlit stretch of beach was empty except for them.

"What in the world can those be?" asked Captain Folsom.

"They are made of metal," said Jack. "See how the moonlight gleams upon them. By George, Captain, they are big as whales. Can they be some type of torpedo-shaped boat controlled by radio?"

"This is luck," exclaimed Captain Folsom. "That's just what they are. Probably, those two scoundrels were coming down here to see whether they had arrived, coming down here from their radio station. Come on, let's have a look."

He started forward eagerly. Jack was a step behind him. An inarticulate cry from Tom Barnum smote Jack's ears, and he spun about. The next instant he saw a man almost upon him, swinging for his head with a club. He tried to dodge, to avoid the blow, but the club clipped him on the side of the head and knocked him to the ground. His senses reeled, and he struggled desperately to rise, but to no avail. A confused sound of shouts and cries and struggling filled his ears, then it seemed as if a wave engulfed him, and he lost consciousness.

When he recovered his senses, Jack found himself lying in darkness. He tried to move, but discovered his hands and feet were tied. He lay quiet, listening. A faint moan came to his ears.

"Who's that?" he whispered.

"That you, Jack?" came Frank's voice in reply, filled with anxiety.

It was close at hand.

"Yes. Where's Bob?"

"He's here, but I'm worried about him. I can't get any sound from him."

"What happened?" asked Jack, his head buzzing, and sore. "Where are the others?"

"Guess we're all here, Mister Jack," answered Tom Barnum's voice, out of the darkness. "Leastways, Captain What's-his-name's here beside me, but he don't speak, neither."

"Good heavens," exclaimed Jack, in alarm, and making a valiant effort to shake off his dizziness. "Where are we? What happened? Frank, do you know? Tom, do you?"

"Somebody jumped on me from behind," said Frank, "and then the fellow I was sitting on, this Higginbotham, squirmed around and took a hand, and I got the worst of it, and was hustled off to the old Brownell house and thrown in this dark room. I had my hands full and couldn't see what was going on. I heard Tom yell, but at the same time this fellow jumped on me. That's all I know."

"There was a dozen or more of 'em come out of the woods," said Tom. "They sneaked out. We was pretty close to the trees. I just happened to look back, an' they was on us. Didn't even have time to pull my pistol. They just bowled me over by weight of numbers. Like Mister Frank, I had my own troubles and couldn't see what happened to the rest of you."

There was a momentary silence, broken by Jack.

"It's easy to see what happened," he said, bitterly. "What fools we were. Those things on the beach were radio-controlled boats which had brought liquor ashore, and a gang was engaged in carrying it up to the Brownell house. We happened along when the beach was clear, and Higginbotham and that other scoundrel were the vanguard of the returning party. When they shouted on being attacked by you and Bob, and Frank, the rest who were behind them in the woods were given the alarm, sneaked up quietly, and bagged us all. A pretty mess."

A groan from Bob interrupted.

"Poor old Bob," said Jack, contritely, for he had been blaming the headstrong fellow in his thoughts for having caused their difficulties by his precipitate attack on Higginbotham. "He seems to have gotten the worst of it."

"Look here, Jack," said Frank suddenly. "My hands and feet are tied, and I suppose yours are, too. I'm going to roll over toward you, and do you try to open the knots on my hands with your teeth."

"Would if I could, Frank," said Jack. "But that clip I got on the side of my head must have loosened all my teeth. They ache like sixty."

"All right, then I'll try my jaws on your bonds."

Presently, Frank was alongside Jack in the darkness.

"Here, where are your hands?" he said.

After some squirming about, Frank found what he sought, and began to chew and pull at the ropes binding Jack's hands. It was a tedious process at first, but presently he managed to get the knot sufficiently loosened to permit of his obtaining a good purchase, and then, in a trice, the ropes fell away.

"Quick now, Jack," he said, anxiously. "We don't know how long we'll be left undisturbed. Somebody may come along any minute. Untie your feet and then free Tom and me, and we can see how Bob and Captain Folsom are fixed."

Jack worked with feverish haste. After taking the bonds from his ankles, he undid those binding Frank. The latter immediately went to the side of Bob, whose groans had given way to long, shuddering sighs that indicated a gradual restoration of consciousness but that also increased the alarm of his comrades regarding his condition.

Tom Barnum next was freed and at once set to work to perform a similar task for Captain Folsom, who meantime had regained his senses and apparently was injured no more severely than Jack, having like him received a clout on the side of the head. Tom explained the situation while untying him. Fortunately, the bonds in all cases had been only hastily tied.

"Bob, this is Frank. Do you hear me? Frank." The latter repeated anxiously, several times, in the ear of his comrade.

"Frank?" said Bob, thickly, at last. "Oh, my head."

"Thank heaven, you're alive," said Frank fervently, and there was a bit of tremulo in his tone. He and the big fellow were very close to each other. "Now just lie quiet, and I'll explain where you are and what happened. But first tell me are you hurt any place other than your head?"

"No, I think not," said Bob. "But the old bean's humming like a top. What happened, anyhow? Where are we? Where are the others?"

"Right here, old thing," said Jack, on the other side of the prone figure.

Thereupon Bob, too, was put in possession of the facts as to what had occurred. At the end of the recital, he sat up, albeit with an effort, for his head felt, as he described it, "like Fourth of July night—and no safe and sane Fourth, at that."

"I don't know if you fellows can ever forgive me," he said, with a groan. "I got you into this. I saw red, when I discovered it was Higginbotham and that other rascal who had set the plane afire. There they were, in the woods, and I set out to crawl after them. Frank followed me."

"Tried to stop him," interposed Frank. "But he wouldn't be stopped. I didn't dare call to the rest of you for fear of giving the alarm, so I went along. Anyhow, Bob," he added, loyally, "I felt just the same way you did about it, and you were no worse than I."

"No," said Bob. "You weren't to blame at all. It was all my fault."

"Forget it," said Jack. "Let's consider what to do now? Here we are, five of us, and now that we are on guard we ought to be able to give a pretty good account of ourselves. I, for one, don't propose to sit around and wait for our captors to dispose of us. How about the rest of you?"

"Say on, Jack," said Frank. "If Bob's all right, nothing matters."

"You have something in mind, Hampton, I believe," said Captain Folsom, quietly. "What is it?"

CHAPTER XII

THE WINDOWLESS ROOM

"I HAVE no plan," said Jack, "except this: We have freed ourselves of our bonds, and we ought to make an effort to escape. And, if we can make our escape," he added, determinedly, "I, for one, am anxious to try to turn the tables."

"Turn the tables, Jack?" exclaimed Frank. "What do you mean? How could we do that?"

"If we could capture the smugglers' radio plant," Jack suggested, "and call help, we could catch these fellows in the act. Of course, I know, there is only a slim chance that we could get immediate aid in this isolated spot. But I've been thinking of that possibility. Do you suppose any boats of the 'Dry Navy' about which you spoke are in the vicinity, Captain Folsom?"

In the darkness, the latter could be heard to stir and move closer. All five, as a matter of fact, had drawn together and spoke in whispers that were barely audible.

"That is a bully idea, Hampton," said Captain Folsom, with quickened interest. "Yes, I am certain one or more of Lieutenant Summers's fleet of sub chasers is along this stretch of coast. From Montauk Point to Great South Bay, he told me recently, he intended to set a watch at sea for smugglers."

"Very good," said Jack. "Then, if we can gain possession of the smugglers' radio plant and call help, we may be able to catch these fellows and make a big haul. For, I presume, they must be bringing a big shipment of liquor ashore now. And, as the night is far advanced, doubtless they will keep it here until, say, to-morrow night, when they would plan to send it to the city in trucks. Don't you fellows imagine that is about what their plan of procedure would be?"

All signified approval in some fashion or other.

"Our first step, of course," said Captain Folsom, "must be to gain our freedom from the house. Are any of you familiar with the interior? Also, has anybody got any matches? My service pistol has been taken, and I presume you fellows also have been searched and deprived of your weapons?"

General affirmation followed.

"But about matches? Will you please search your pockets, everybody?"

The boys never carried matches, being non-

smokers. Tom Barnum, however, not only produced a paper packet of matches but, what was far more valuable at the moment, a flashlight of flat, peculiar shape which he carried in a vest pocket and which his captors had overlooked in their hurried search. He flashed it once, and discovered it was in good working order.

"So far, so good," said Captain Folsom. "Now to discover the extent of our injuries, before we proceed any further. Mine aren't enough to keep me out of any fighting. How about the rest of you?"

"Frank's been binding up my head with the tail of my shirt," said Bob. "But I guess he could do a better job if he received a flash from that light of yours, Tom. Just throw it over here on my head, will you?"

Tom complied, and it was seen Bob had received a nasty wound which had laid the scalp open on the left side three or four inches. The cut had bled profusely. With the light to work by, Frank, who like his companions was proficient in first aid treatment of injuries, shredded a piece of the white shirting for lint, made a compress, and then bound the whole thing tightly. Jack's blow was not so serious, but Frank bound his head, too.

None of the boys nor Tom Barnum ever had been inside the Brownell house before, although all were

more or less familiar with its outer appearance. Tom now made a careless survey of the room by the aid of his flashlight. He would flash it on for only a moment, as he moved about soundlessly, having removed his shoes, and he so hid the rays under his coat that very little light showed. This he did in order to prevent as much as possible any rays falling through cracks in the walls or floor, and betraying their activity.

The room, Tom found on completing his survey, was without windows and possessed of only one door, a massive oaken affair with great strap iron hinges and set in a ponderous frame. From the slope of the ceiling at the sides, he judged the room was under the roof. Walls and ceiling were plastered.

Not a sound had penetrated into the room from the outside, or from the other parts of the house, and at this all had marveled earlier. Tom's report of the survey supplied an answer to the mystery. There was little chance for sound to penetrate within.

"But a room without windows?" said Jack. "How, then, does it happen the air is fresh?"

"There's a draught from up above," answered Tom. "I cain't see any skylight, but there may be an air port back in the angle of the roof tree. Say, Mister Jack, this room gives me the creeps," he

added, his voice involuntarily taking on an awed tone. "A room without windows. An' over in the far corner I found some rusted iron rings fastened to big staples set deep into a post in the wall."

"What, Tom? You don't say."

"Yes, siree. Ol' Brownell, the pirate whaler's, been dead for a long time. But there's queer stories still around these parts about him an' his house; stories not only 'bout how he was killed finally by the men as he'd cheated, but also 'bout a mysterious figure in white that used to be seen on the roof, an' yells heard comin' from here. You know what?" He leaned closer, and still further lowered his voice. "I'll bet this room was a cell fer some crazy body an' ol' Brownell kept him or her chained up when violent. Some people still say, you know, as how that white figure wa'n't a ghost but the ol' man's crazy wife."

"Brrr."

Frank shivered in mock terror and grinned in the darkness. "Some place to be," he added.

Nevertheless, light though he made of Tom's story, the hour, the circumstances in which they found themselves, the mystery of the windowless room, all combined to inspire in him an uncanny feeling, as if unseen hands were reaching for him from the dark.

"Getting out is still our first consideration," Captain Folsom said. "What Barnum reports makes it

look difficult, but let's see. Have you tried the door? Is it locked?"

"Tried it?" said Tom. "Ain't possible. There ain't neither handle nor knob inside, to pull on. No lock nor keyhole in it, neither. Must be barred on the outside. That's another reason for thinkin' it was built for a prison cell."

"And if the old pirate kept a crazy woman in here when she was violent," supplied Jack, "you can bet he built the walls thick to smother her yells. That's why we hear no sounds."

There was silence for a time. Each was busy with his own thoughts. The prospect, indeed, looked dark. How could they escape from a cell such as this?

Jack was first to break the silence.

"Look here," said he, "fresh air is admitted into this room in some fashion, and, probably, as Tom surmised, through an air port in the ceiling. It may be the old pirate even built a trap door in the roof. Obviously, anyhow, our best and, in fact, our only chance to escape lies through the roof. It may be possible to break through there, whereas we couldn't get through walls or the door. Let's investigate."

Eager whispers approved the proposal.

"Come on, Tom," Jack continued, "we'll investigate that angle in the roof tree. You brace yourself against the wall, and I'll stand on your shoulders."

The two moved away with the others close behind them. Jack mounted on Tom Barnum's shoulders. He found the ceiling sloped up to a lofty peak. Running his hands up each slope, he could discern no irregularity. But, suddenly, nearing the top, where the sides drew together, he felt a strong draught of air on his hands.

Their positions at the time were this: Tom was leaning against the end wall, with Jack on his shoulders, and facing the wall. The ceiling sloped upward on each side and it was up these slopes Jack had been running his hands. Tall as he was, and standing upright, his head still was some feet from the roof tree above, where the sloping sidewalls joined.

When he felt the inrush of air on his hands, which were then above his head, Jack reached forward. He encountered no wall at all. But, about a foot above his head, instead, his fingers encountered the edge of an opening in the end wall and under the roof tree. Trembling with excitement, he felt along the edge from side wall to side wall, and found the opening was more than two feet across.

Not a word had been said, meanwhile, not a whisper uttered. Now, leaning down, and in a voice barely audible, Jack whispered to the anxious group at his feet:

"Fellows, there's an opening up here under the roof tree. I can't tell yet what it is, but if you hand me up Tom's flashlight I'll have a look at it."

Frank passed the little electric torch upward, flashing it once to aid Jack in locating it in the darkness. Again Jack straightened up carefully. Holding the flat little flashlight between his teeth, he gripped the edge of the opening and chinned himself. Then, holding on with one hand, with the other he manipulated the flashlight.

One glance was sufficient. It revealed a tunnel-like passage under the roof tree. This passage was triangular in shape, with the beam of the roof tree at the peak, the sloping, unplastered sides of the roof and a flat, solid floor. It extended some distance forward, apparently, for the rays of the flashlight did not reveal any wall across it. The floor was solidly planked, probably a yard wide, instead of two feet-plus of Jack's original estimate, and the height from floor to roof tree was all of two and a half feet.

Laying down the flashlight, Jack drew himself over the edge of the opening. Then, moving cautiously forward in the darkness, not daring to throw the light ahead of him for fear of betraying his presence, he crawled on hands and knees. The draught of air through the passageway was strong, and he had not proceeded far before he saw ahead

faint bars across the passage, not of light but of lesser darkness.

He decided there was some opening at the end of the passage, but could not imagine what it might be. When he came up to it, however, the solution was simple. Immediately under the peak of the roof tree, in a side wall, was an opening in which was set a slatted shutter. This admitted air, yet kept rain from beating in.

And in a flash, Jack realized to what ingenious lengths the original owner of the house had gone in order to provide for his prisoner a cell that would be virtually soundproof, yet have a supply of fresh air. So high, too, was the opening of the passage in the cell that one person could not reach it unaided.

Jubilant at his discovery and with a plan for putting it to use as a means of escape, Jack, unable to turn about in the narrow passage, worked his way backward until the projection of his feet into emptiness warned him he had reached the room. Then he let himself down and, when once more with his companions, explained the nature of his discovery.

"We can lift that shutter out," he added, "and swing upward to the roof tree. There is a cupola, an old-fashioned cupola, on this house, as I remember it. Once we are on the roof, we can work our way to that cupola and probably find a trapdoor leading down

into the house. If we decide that is too dangerous, we may be able to slide down the gutters. Anyhow, once we are in the outer air and on the roof, we'll be in a better position than here. Come on. I'll go up first, and then help Captain Folsom up. Do the rest of you follow, and, as Frank is the lightest, he ought to come last. The last man will have to be pulled up with our belts, as he will have nobody to stand on."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TABLES TURNED

NEGOTIATION of the entrance of all into the passageway was made without accident, Tom Barnum staying until next to last and then, with a number of belts buckled together, aiding Frank to gain the opening. Meanwhile Jack, who was in the lead, found on closer investigation that the slatted shutter obscuring the air port was on hinges and caught with a rusted latch. To open the latch and unhinge the shutter and then, by turning it sideways, pull it back into the passageway and place it noiselessly on the floor, was a comparatively simple matter.

Whispering to Captain Folsom, next in line, to pass the word along that all should stay in the passageway while he investigated the situation outside, Jack squirmed partway through the opening, faced upward, took a good clutch on the shingled edge of the rooftree and gradually drew his body out and over the edge of the roof. When, finally, he lay extended on the roof, clutching the saddle for support, he was

of the opinion that Captain Folsom with only one arm to aid him, certainly could not negotiate the exit in similar fashion, and examined the shingles to see whether they could be torn up sufficiently to admit of his friends climbing through.

The moon shone brilliantly. On that side of the house were no lights in any windows. No sounds of any human activity came to him. The house was large, with numerous gables that prevented Jack from seeing seaward.

Leaning over the edge of the roof, he called in a low voice to Captain Folsom who looked up from the little window. Jack told him to wait, and explained he was going to try to rip off a number of shingles.

"But the crosspieces to which the shingles are nailed are close together," Captain Folsom objected. "They are too close to permit of our crawling through. And, while they are light and might be broken, yet we would make considerable noise doing so and might give the alarm."

Jack considered a moment.

"That's true," he replied. "But, if I break off the shingles around the peak of the roof, here at the very end, you will have a better chance to climb out, then, because you will have the exposed crosspieces to cling to."

Working rapidly, Jack managed to remove a patch of shingles over a space of several square feet, in short order. By the exercise of extreme caution, he was enabled to complete the work without making other than very slight noise.

"Now," he said, speaking through the bars made by the crosspieces, "come ahead, Captain. Put your head backward out of the window, and place your hand just where I tell you. I shall hook my feet under these crosspieces to brace myself. That will leave both hands free to aid you."

Captain Folsom followed directions, and with Jack lending his support, he managed to gain the roof. Then Bob, Tom Barnum and Frank followed in quick succession. To make room for them, Jack and Captain Folsom had worked their way along the rooftree, which was not the main rooftree of the house, they had discovered, but that of one of the side gables, with which, as Jack phrased it, "the house was all cluttered up."

This particular rooftree was blocked ahead by the cupola, to which Jack earlier had referred. It was a square, truncated tower with a breast-high wooden balustrade around it. Jack climbed up this balustrade, and Captain Folsom, with Bob aiding him from the rear and Jack giving him a hand in front, followed.

Then, while the others were clambering up, Jack cast a quick look around from this eminence. He found, however, that the trees of the grove cut off any view of the beach. But he was enabled to see the grill-like towers of the radio station some distance to the left of the house. With satisfaction, he noted not a light was shown, and apparently the place was deserted.

Still not a sound of human activity of any sort reached him, and Jack was puzzled. Had their captors departed, and left them bound, in that apparently impregnable cell, to die? He could not believe it. No, surely they were not to be killed. Either the house was to be abandoned by the smugglers, and their friends and families would be notified where to find them, or else, the smugglers intended to return for them presently.

If this latter supposition were correct, then, thought Jack, it behooved him to act quickly. For, if the smugglers returned and found they had escaped from the cell, there would be only one conclusion to draw as to their method of escape, and that would be the right one.

Bending down, he saw at once in the bright moonlight the outlines of a big trapdoor under his feet. A ringbolt at one edge showed how it was raised. Seizing it in a firm grip, Jack started to raise the

trap. His heart beat suffocatingly. What would he find underneath?

An inch at a time Jack raised the trap, while the others knelt at the sides, peering through the growing opening. Only darkness met their gaze, and the smell of hot air imprisoned in a closed house came out like a blast from a furnace door. The hinges, apparently long unused and rusted, creaked alarmingly despite all the care Jack exercised. But not a sound came up from below.

At length Jack threw back the door, and the bright moonlight pouring down the opening in a flood of silver revealed a narrow, ladder-like stairway descending to an uncarpeted hall. Jack started down with the others at his heels.

In the hall he paused, to once more accustom his eyes to the dimness which now, however, was not impenetrable, as in their cell, because of the moonlight. Presently he was able to make out a long hall with only two doors breaking the double expanse of wall. One door, on the right, was massive and over it was a huge iron bar in a socket.

"That's the door to the cell they had us in," said Frank, with conviction, as they stood grouped before it. "Brrr. We'd have had a fine chance to break that down."

Leading the way and walking on the balls of his

feet, shoes in hand, Jack moved forward to the other door and had just laid his hand on the knob and was about to turn it, when he heard voices on the other side and the sound of footsteps mounting upward.

His mind worked lightning-fast in this crisis. It was the door of a stairway leading to the lower part of the house. Somebody was ascending it, not one man but several. They could have only one purpose. There was only one room up here on this upper floor—the cell. Therefore, whoever was coming up intended to visit them, thinking they still were in that room.

These thoughts flashed through Jack's mind in less time than it took a man to mount a step. And, as quickly, he thought of a plan. Turning to his companions, he whispered:

"Quick, get back to the cupola stairs, Frank, because you're nearest. Then run up and lower the trapdoor, and crouch outside until I call you. The rest of us can crouch down in this little space beyond the door, and we'll be hidden by it when the door swings open."

Frank was off on noiseless feet, while the other four huddled into the space indicated by Jack. By the time the men mounting the stairs swung the door inward, Frank had succeeded in gaining the cupola. The noise made by the rusted hinges, as the

trap was lowered was covered up by the voices of the men.

Fortunately, they did not close the stair door, but left it standing open, thus hiding the four behind it. There were three in the party, judging by the sound of voices and footsteps, and one at least carried a powerful electric flashlight.

"Thought I heard a scratching sound," said a voice, which Jack and Bob recognized as that of Higginbotham. "But I guess it was made by mice. This old house is filled with them."

A few steps farther along the party paused, and Jack, looking from his hiding place, saw three figures, shadowy and indistinct, before the huge door of the cell, upon which one man had thrown the light, while another was fumbling at the bar. The door swung open, and the three walked in.

"Come on," whispered Jack.

Not waiting for the others, realizing it would be only a moment or two before their disappearance from the cell would be discovered, he leaped from hiding, tore down the little hall like a whirlwind, dashed against the great door and swung it into place. Bob, who was close at his heels, dropped the iron bar into place.

They were not a moment too soon. Shouts of amazement and alarm came from the room even as

the door was swinging shut. And hardly had Bob dropped the bar into the socket than those within threw themselves against the door. So tremendously thick and strong was the latter, however, that with its closing all sound from within was reduced to the merest whisper. As for trying to move it, as well attempt to push an elephant over by hand. This those within must have realized, for presently they desisted.

"Got 'em in their own cage," said Jack, triumphantly. And, pulling from his pocket Tom Barnum's little flashlight, he reassured himself the door really was barred, then mounting the stairway thumped on the trapdoor as a signal to Frank. The latter at once raised the door.

"Come on down, Frank," said Jack. "There were three of them, and we penned them in the cell."

Hastily he explained what had occurred.

"Now, fellows," said he. "Let's see who else is downstairs. Let's see if we can't get out of here, so we can radio Lieutenant Summers for help."

"But how about leaving these chaps behind, Jack?" protested Bob. "They can get out the same way we did, and give the alarm. What we want to do is to bring Lieutenant Summers to the scene without letting these rascals get an inkling of what's hanging over them. If Higginbotham and his companions

escape, he'll start a search for us, and our plans will stand a fair chance of being spoiled."

"You're right, Bob," said Jack. "But what can we do? They can't get out of there in a minute. It will take them some time because, for one reason, they will be fearful of our lying in wait for them, perhaps. Meantime, we can be moving fast. Captain Folsom," he added, deferring to the older man, "what do you think we ought to do?"

But the latter laid his sound arm on Jack's shoulder.

"Listen," he cautioned.

Muffled, but distinct, there came an outbreak of pistol shots, followed by shouts faintly heard.

"What I feared," said Captain Folsom. "They are out on the roof already, and shooting and calling to attract help. Come. We have no time to lose."

Fumbling his way along the dark hall toward the stair door, he said:

"Quick, Hampton, with your light. I can't find the knob. Ah"—as the light of the little torch winked on—"that's better."

He pulled the door open, and started down the stairs, Jack at his shoulder and flashing the light ahead. The others crowded at their heels.

CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE TUNNEL

At the foot of the stairway was another door, and this stood open. It gave upon another hallway, carpeted richly, and dim, yet not so dark but what Captain Folsom could see his way. This faint illumination came up a great open stairway from a wide and deep living room below into which descended another stairway at the far end of the hall.

A male voice, not unmusical, singing a rousing chorus in Italian, and peering circumspectly through an open balustrade into that lower room, Captain Folsom saw the singer seated at a great square piano, a giant of a man with a huge shock of dark brown hair and ferocious mustaches, while a coal black negro, even huger in size, lolled negligently at one end of the keyboard, his red lips parted wide in a grin of enjoyment and ivory white teeth showing between, and at the other end of the piano, with his elbows planted on the instrument and his head pressed between his hands, stood or rather leaned a

rough-looking man of medium height, his grizzled hair all awry where he had run his fingers through it, and wearing a khaki shirt open at the throat.

"Sing that again, Pete. What d'ye call it? The Bull Fighter Song, hey? Well, I don't know much about music, but that gits under my skin. Come on."

The man called Pete was about to comply, and the Negro was nodding his head in violent approval, when the door from the outside gallery was burst open unceremoniously, and a villainous looking individual whirled into the room in a state of great excitement. Others were behind him but, evidently not daring to venture within, stood grouped in the open doorway.

"Here, Mike, wot d'ye mean, comin' in like this? Into a gentleman's house, too. Don't ye know any better, ye scut?" demanded the first speaker, he who had asked for a repetition of the song.

Evidently, thought Captain Folsom, here was the leader, for the other deferred to him, although it was apparent he was a privileged character.

"Ah, now, Paddy Ryan," said the man called Mike; "ah, now, Paddy Ryan, sure an' I know 'tis a gentleman's house since you rule it. But do them fellers on the roof know it?"

"Fellers on the roof?" said Ryan, advancing a

step, threateningly. "Mike, ye been drinkin' again. An' the night's work not done yet. Out on ye, ye—ye ——"

"Listen," said Mike, holding up a hand. "Listen. 'Tis all I ask. Sure an' wid Pete caterwaulin', 'tis no wonder at all ye cannot hear wot's goin' on. Hear the shootin' now, don't ye?"

As if he were a magician calling the demonstration into being at command, the shooting and shouting of the trio on the roof, which for the moment had died down, was now violently renewed. Ryan's lower jaw dropped open grotesquely.

"Now will ye believe me?" demanded Mike, triumphantly.

"Who—who is it?" asked Ryan, still in the grip of his astonishment.

"How should we know?" asked Mike. "We was comin' up from the beach wid another cargo o' the stuff when we hear it."

"Mistuh Higginbotham went up to de roof wid two men," interposed the gigantic negro. "Leastways, he done went up to see 'bout dem prisonahs an' ax 'em a few quistions."

"You're right, George," said Ryan. "I'd forgotten. Listen to that. There they go again. Come on."

He darted for the outer door, the negro George,

Pete and Mike at his heels. The crowd of mixed whites and blacks in the doorway gave 'way before him. In a trice they all were gone. The room was deserted.

"Now is our chance," said Captain Folsom, to the three boys and Tom Barnum, crouching beside him. "Come on. We must get downstairs and out of the house before they return, for return they will as soon as they understand what the fellows on the roof have to tell of our mysterious disappearance."

He darted down the stairs, two at a time, with the four others close behind him. Halfway across the big room, however, he halted abruptly and groaned:

"Too late. They're coming back."

"Here," cried Jack, seizing him by an arm, and pushing him along. "Quick, fellows, through this door. It's a chance."

Jack had observed a closed door, near the piano, and the others followed pell-mell behind him and Captain Folsom. Frank, the last to enter, closed the door and, finding his hand encounter a key, turned it in the lock.

None too soon. They could hear shouts and curses, as the mob surged up the stairway.

Jack, meanwhile, had been flashing Tom's torch

about and, discovering a wall switch, had pressed a button. At once an electric light in the ceiling flashed on, revealing that they were in a large pantry. Bottles of liquor stood about and, on a tray, were a number of sandwiches.

"That black butler was preparing to feed his boss," surmised Frank. "Well, those chicken sandwiches look all right. I'm goin' to have one. Hungry."

And without more ado, Frank took a sandwich and began eating.

"Great stuff," he said.

"Say, you, come on," called Jack, smiling a little, nevertheless, despite his anxiety. "Think of eating at a time like this!"

"Why not?" said Frank, polishing off the first sandwich and taking another. "Well, lead on, Macduff. Where you going?"

"There's no way out of this except by the cellar," Jack replied, already having opened the other door of the pantry and shot the rays of his searchlight down the stairway. "Shall we try it?"

"We can't stay here," answered Captain Folsom. "They're searching the rooms above us right now, by the sound of it. Soon they'll be down here. And we can't go out through the living room, because I've withdrawn the key and peeped through the key-

hole in the door and can see two men on guard at the foot of the stairway."

Tom Barnum up to this moment had had little to say. Now, however, he came forward with a remark that caused the others to stare in amazement.

"There's said to be a secret passage from the cellar to Starfish Cove or thereabouts," he said. "I don't know nothin' about it, but that's what folks say. They say as how old Pirate Brownell was afraid his sins would catch up with him some day, and hoped to escape by the passage when the avengers came. He couldn't do it, however. He wasn't quick enough."

"A secret passage?" said Jack. "Come on. Last man closes the cellar door and locks it from the inside."

Frank was the last to go. Before quitting the pantry, he stuffed the remaining sandwiches into his trousers pockets, seized on a tremendous butcher knife which was lying on the butler's cabinet, and switched off the light. Then he locked the cellar stairway door, and descended to where the others awaited him at the foot.

They stood, as well as they could discern, in the midst of a huge cellar piled high with cases upon cases of bottles and barrels, too.

"Whew," said Captain Folsom, "this looks like a bonded liquor warehouse. If we could only raid this place right now, it would be the richest haul in the history of the country since the nation went dry."

"Is all this liquor?" asked Frank, incredulously.

"It is," said Captain Folsom, pulling a bottle from the nearest case and examining the label critically. "And it's the genuine stuff, too. Brought in from the Bahamas. English and Scotch whiskey."

Louder shouts overhead and the noise of many feet descending stairs warned them the pursuit had drawn to the ground floor, and that they were in momentary danger of discovery.

"Those two doors won't hold long," said Jack, anxiously. "If we can't find that tunnel entrance, we are out of luck. I think myself, we had better look for a door to the outside and try to escape that way."

At that moment, Tom Barnum's voice, low but tense and thrilling with excitement, came out of the darkness ahead.

"Mister Jack, Mister Jack, come here. Here where ye see my light."

The others had not missed Tom before. But immediately on reaching the cellar, he had gone

exploring by the light of the matches he had found in his pockets, without troubling Jack for the flashlight.

Hurriedly, the others now made their way to where a dim gleam of light which went out before they reached it only to be succeeded by another, showed where Tom was awaiting them. When they reached his side, they found him crouched at the foot of a wall, pushing and straining at a big barrel.

"Lend a hand," he panted. "The entrance is back here."

Almost over their heads on the floor above, an attack was made at this moment on the door connecting living room and pantry. They could hear the shouts to surrender, to unlock the door, and the blows being rained upon the barrier.

"Push. It's a-movin'."

The barrel did move aside sufficiently to admit of a man getting between it and the wall, and in the rays of the flashlight appeared a small, door-like opening in the stone.

"In with ye, every one," said Tom. "I'll pile a couple o' these cases on top of each other to cover up the entrance, an' climb over it."

The door above, the first of the two impeding pursuit, fell with a splintering crash. There was a

shout of triumph, giving way to surprise when the pantry was found untenanted. Captain Folsom and the boys without more delay crawled into the opening. They could hear Tom piling cases over the entrance, then a thud as, having climbed his barricade, he dropped to the cellar floor on the inside. Then he joined them.

Once more, Jack called the precious flashlight into play, and all could see they stood in a narrow, brick-walled tunnel, with a vaulted roof above. It was some four feet high, preventing them from standing upright, and the walls were a yard apart. The next moment the flashlight flickered and died.

"Gone," said Jack. "Burned out. Now we are ditched."

"Not yet," said Captain Folsom, resolutely. "Barnum, how many matches have you?"

"About a dozen left in this packet," answered Tom's voice in the darkness. "But they're them paper things the cigar companies give away. Got 'em the other day when I was to the village. They're not much good."

"They're better than nothing," answered the captain. "They were good enough to enable you to find this tunnel. Come, there's no need to despair. I've got some matches myself, big ones. I'll give them to you, and do you lead the way."

Striking a match, he located Tom behind him. Handing him a dozen big matches which he had found in a trousers pocket, he pressed against the wall to permit of Tom's passing him. The others did likewise.

"Keep right behind me an' touchin' each other," said Tom. "I can feel the wall on each side with my hands, an' so can the rest of ye as we go along. I'll save the matches till we need them."

Without more ado, he set out, Jack, Bob, Frank and Captain Folsom at his heels in the order mentioned. They found that, despite the pitchy-black darkness, they were able to make good progress, for the narrow confines of the tunnel permitted of no going astray. All kept listening with strained attention for sounds of pursuit, but none came for so long they began to feel more hopeful. Perhaps, their pursuers did not know of the secret passage. No, that was unlikely, inasmuch as one or other of the smugglers must have seen the tunnel mouth when he placed that barrel before it. Faint shouts from the cellar came to their ears, indicating a search for them was in progress there. The smugglers probably would look to see whether they were hidden among the barrels and cases, and not until that search had been thoroughly prosecuted would they investigate the tunnel.

These reflections were exchanged among them as they proceeded. Suddenly the air, which had been remarkably fresh, although earthy-smelling, became cleaner. All felt they were approaching an exit. The next moment Tom Barnum stumbled and fell forward.

CHAPTER XV

RESCUE AT HAND

For a moment Tom could be heard muttering rueful exclamations as he caressed his bruises. Jack who was next in line was trying to help him to his feet. His foot, too, struck an obstruction which caused him to lose balance. To avoid falling on Tom, he put out his arms toward the walls. Instead of meeting solid brickwork as before, however, he felt his hands encounter crumbling earth. He lurched forward, and his face was buried in a mass of mould.

Spluttering and blowing, he scrabbled around and his fingers closed over a root. It came away in his clutch. The next moment a slide of earth cascaded downward and Jack found himself leaning against a bank of dirt, an uprooted bush in one hand, and a patch of moonlight and sky overhead.

It was all clear. Where the tunnel approached close to the surface, the roof and walls had caved in. Tom had stumbled over this mound and fallen, and

Jack accidentally had torn away the screen of bushes obscuring the hole above.

"Come on, fellows," he cried, delightedly, scrambling upward, while Tom Barnum, who had regained his feet and observed how the land lay, boosted him; "come on, here's a place to get out of the tunnel."

Quickly the others followed. They stood in the midst of a grove of trees. Some distance to the rear twinkled lights which indicated the location of the Brownell house. No sounds of pursuit reached them. But, stay. What was that? Captain Folsom bent down, his ear close to the opening whence they had climbed out and up to the surface.

"They've found the tunnel, I'm afraid," he said. "They are coming."

"Can't we keep 'em back here?" said Bob, unexpectedly. "We can kick more dirt down into the tunnel. And we can jump down and heave out a lot of those fallen bricks, and so keep the gang back when they arrive."

"But we couldn't keep up a defense like that forever," objected Jack. "Some of them would be bound to go back through the tunnel, swing around, and attack us from the rear. They have weapons, and we haven't. We'd be caught between two fires."

Bob grunted.

"Guess you're right. But I hate all this running away. I'd like to take a crack at them. Never gave me a fair chance the first time, jumping on me in a gang, and when I had my back turned, too."

"I know how you feel, Bob," said Jack. "But, without weapons, run we must. And we had better be quick about it now, too. They won't be long working through that tunnel, if they have lights."

"No, the shouts are growing closer," said Captain Folsom, bending down again to the hole. "But, look here, Hampton, you make a run to that radio station which I see above the trees there, to the right, in that opening. We'll stay here until they reach the hole. Then we'll batter them with bricks, and flee to the left. That will create a diversion, and give you a chance to try to raise Lieutenant Summers."

"Good idea," grunted Bob, immediately dropping into the hole and tossing out broken bricks from the crumbling walls.

"Don't let them get too close to you," warned Jack. "They're armed. And run toward home. They won't follow far. I'll rejoin you somewhere along the beach beyond the boundary fence, if you wait for me."

"We'll wait, if they don't make us run too far," promised Captain Folsom. "In that case, make your

way home. And if you cannot get Lieutenant Summers by radio, don't endanger yourself by delaying too long around here. Now go."

With a nod of understanding, Jack turned and darted down the forest aisles toward the radio station.

Who would he find there? He wondered. Or, would the station be deserted? That it was in working order, there was no doubt, for it was the station's issue of radio control to the liquor containers offshore which they had overheard before deciding to investigate.

Clutching the big butcher knife, the only weapon in the party, which Frank had pressed into his hand as he set out on his lonely mission, Jack dashed ahead recklessly through the trees. The radio plant of the smugglers burst full on his sight, as he came to the edge of the trees fringing a little clearing. No lights showed. Nevertheless, he paused to reconnoitre, asking himself how best to approach it to avoid discovery in case it should have an occupant.

As he stood there, a sudden outburst of shouts to the rear, followed by a few revolver shots, warned him the pursuers had reached the hole in the tunnel. He hoped big Bob was controlling his recklessness, and not running into danger. If his friends kept down, there was no great danger of their being shot,

for only one man at a time could approach through the tunnel and him they could pelt into retreat with their bricks.

The shots ceased. The shouts died. Jack grinned in satisfaction. The enemy had been halted. Now, if his friends only utilized their opportunity to hurry away before being attacked from the rear, all would be well. He listened with strained attention. No further sounds of combat reached him.

Meanwhile, he had been examining the ground. The moon was low down. What time had they left home? Two o'clock? By the look of the moon it must be near four now. That would be about right. Although it seemed a lifetime, although an excess of excitement had been crowded into that period, still only about two hours had elapsed.

Having the door of the radio station in full view, and observing no signs of life, as would have been the case providing some one had been present, for he would have been drawn to the door by this new and closer outburst of fighting, Jack decided to chance crossing the glade directly.

Darting ahead, he crouched listening, heard nothing, then flung wide the door which opened outward and sprang back. The moonlight fell full inside a long bar of light. The sending room, at least, was empty. Now for the power plant.

Jack entered, going warily, knife clutched in his hand, despite his growing confidence that he had the place to himself. There was a door at the rear. Behind that must be the power plant. He set his ear to the door. Only the low hum of a dynamo came to his ears. He had expected that, for wiring glimpsed outside the Brownell house and leading in this direction through the trees had indicated the house current was supplied from the power house here. But was anyone in that other room, in attendance?

There was a key in the connecting door. He tried the handle softly. The door was locked. Good. At least he would be safe from surprise from that quarter. All the while, in order to guard against surprise from the outside, he had been standing sideways, one eye on the outer door. Now something glimpsed there surprised an exclamation from him.

It was not that anyone appeared in the doorway. No, but offshore and not far distant a bright searchlight suddenly cut athwart the night, putting the moonlight to shame. It swung in a wide arc across the sky and then came down to the shore and began moving relentlessly along the beach.

He could not follow its movements fully. He could not see whence it came. The grove of trees

intervening between the shore of Starfish Cove and the radio plant cut off complete view. But a wild hope leaped into his mind. Would the smugglers in the liquor ship offshore be likely to show a light? He did not consider it likely. Then, what sort of ship was it probable the light came from?

"By George," he said aloud, "maybe that's a boat of the 'Dry Navy' already on the track of these scoundrels."

He stood, gazing at that finger of light, spellbound. What else could the ship be that would be casting a searchlight along the shore, along this particular stretch of shore of all places, and at this particular time, what else could it be than a government boat?

Breaking the spell that bound him, he sprang to the instrument table, seized and adjusted a headpiece, pulled a transmitter to him, threw over the rheostat and adjusting the tuner to the 575 meter wave length which Captain Folsom had told him the government boats employed, he began calling. What should he say if a government boat replied? He decided on a plan of procedure.

Presently his receivers crackled, and he manipulated the controls until the sputtering ceased, when he heard a voice saying:

"U. S. Revenue Cutter Nark. Who is calling?"

Scarcely able to control his excitement at this almost unbelievable good luck, Jack stammered in reply. Then getting a grip on his emotions, he replied:

"Speaking for Captain Folsom. Is Lieutenant Summers aboard? Are you offshore?"

"We're offshore, all right," answered his correspondent, in a tone of the utmost surprise. "But how in the world do you know?"

"I want to speak to Lieutenant Summers," answered Jack, grinning to himself at the other's bewilderment. Even at this crucial moment, he could not resist the temptation to mystify the other a little. "As to knowing you're offshore," he added, "I can see you."

"See us? Say, this is too much for me. Wait till I call Lieutenant Summers," said the other. "Did you say Captain Folsom?"

"That's the name," said Jack. "Hurry, please. This is a matter of life and death."

Almost at once another voice took up the conversation, and from the tone of crisp authority, Jack sensed it must be the officer he had asked for speaking. Such, indeed, was the case. Lieutenant Summers was aboard the Nark, directing operations, and, as the radio room was in the chart house of the cutter, he had intervened on hearing his operator

mention his own name and that of his colleague, Captain Folsom.

"Now, what's this all about?" he demanded. "Is Captain Folsom there? If so, put him on the phone."

"Are you Lieutenant Summers, sir?" asked Jack, respectfully.

"I am. Who are you? Where are you calling from? Where is Captain Folsom?"

"He's not here," said Jack, "but I am speaking for him. He's in grave danger ashore. Moreover, he wanted me to call for you, and if you are offshore near Starfish Cove—that's a little bay far down the south shore of Long Island—and if it's your ship that is playing a searchlight on the beach, then it's a miracle, sir. I'll try to explain."

Briefly as possible, then, Jack detailed the necessary facts for putting Lieutenant Summers in touch with the situation.

"Good," said Lieutenant Summers, in conclusion; "very good, indeed. We have received a tip liquor was to be landed somewhere along this coast to-night, and were scouting when you saw our light. It's a piece of luck, as you say. Do you think our searchlight has been seen by these rascals?"

"Probably," said Jack, "although I don't know. Captain Folsom and my friends may have kept them

so busily engaged, they had no time to keep a lookout at sea."

"Well, I'll throw off the searchlight at once, anyhow. We want no advertising. I'll come in close and land my boats. Can you be at the beach to guide us?"

"I'll be there," replied Jack.

"Very well. We're about a mile offshore. We should land in fifteen minutes. Good-bye."

Jack took off the headpiece, threw the rheostat back to zero, and looked about him, as if dazed.

He could hardly believe his luck.

CHAPTER XVI

BOB REDEEMS HIMSELF

After Jack's departure the group which he left at the tunnel exit worked busily making what preparations were possible to receive their pursuers. Big Bob, who had jumped down into the opening, kept tossing out bricks at a furious rate, and Frank joined him and did likewise. Meanwhile, by the light of his matches, aided by the moonlight, which here in the woods, however, was not direct enough to be of any great help, Tom Barnum investigated the ground about the hole.

"As soon as the boys get out o' there," he reported to Captain Folsom, "we can all four of us kick down enough dirt to block up the tunnel pretty well. The earth is loose around here. That must'a been a recent cave-in. By yanking up some o' these bushes I already loosened the soil some more."

"Very good," said Captain Folsom, who had been listening closely to the sounds coming through the tunnel. "They're getting too close for comfort. I

agree with you in believing this must have been a recent cave-in. I believe it is unsuspected by the enemy. They are coming along through that tunnel and making plenty of noise, as if they expected to have a considerable distance to go and fancied us pretty far ahead."

"We'll give 'em a surprise," said Tom, grinning. The watchman-mechanic of the Hampton radio plant was still a young man. He had served in France. And he was enjoying the situation.

"Come out now, Temple. And you, Merrick," said Captain Folsom, in a whisper. "To stay any longer would be only to expose yourselves needlessly. You have thrown out a lot of ammunition, as it is. Besides," he added, as he and Tom helped the others climb to the surface, "we want to kick down this dirt to block the tunnel."

The others followed Tom to the lip of the cave-in, overhanging the tunnel, and, exercising care to avoid tumbling in, succeeded in kicking down sufficient earth to more than half fill the opening. Little more than a foot of open space remained, after uprooted bushes had been thrown down on top of the earth.

Working feverishly and in a silence broken only by the dull sounds of the falling dirt, they had completed their task when the nearer approach of voices and of stumbling footfalls within the tunnel warned

them to desist. Bob and Frank on one side of the slight opening, Captain Folsom and Tom Barnum on the other, they threw themselves prone on the ground. The bricks had been divided into two piles, one by the side of each pair.

They were none too soon. Barely had they taken their positions when the first man of the pursuers, proceeding without a light, stumbled against the dirt they had kicked down, and fell forward into the tangle of uprooted bushes. He let out a wild yell:

"Murder. Save me."

Bob raised himself on one hand, craned forward, took good aim at the hole, and let drive with a chunk of broken brick. There was a crack, a howl of anguish, succeeded by an outbreak of curses, as, following Bob's example, his companions also poured in a fire of brickbats from each side.

Several scattered revolver shots rang out, but, as all again had thrown themselves prone on the ground, the bullets sped harmlessly overhead. After waiting a moment, Bob again let drive with a piece of brick. That his aim was good was attested by a howl of anguish, succeeded this time not by more shots but by a scurrying sound of retreat. Evidently, the one or two men in the forefront had had enough, and had withdrawn into the tunnel.

By holding their breath and listening intently, they

could, in fact, hear sounds of scuffling that indicated a considerable number of men were within the tunnel and were moving backward on each other to get away from the danger zone.

Suddenly to Bob's ears came the sound of a faint groan, not a foot from his head, it seemed to him, as he lay on the very edge of the hole, straining to listen. It startled him, but at once he realized whence it came. One of the pursuers, perhaps the man who had stumbled first into their barricade, must have been knocked out by a missile, and was coming to. Then Bob had a wild idea.

Rising to his knees, he peered down into the hole, descried a dark, round object just below him which he took to be the head of a man, and bracing himself with one arm, plunged the other into the hole.

Then, while Frank gasped and Tom Barnum swore softly, from the opposite side, in wondering admiration, the big fellow rose to his feet and with a mighty tug pulled an inert body clear through the hole. One look at the face was sufficient for identification despite the blood streaming from an ugly gash over the right temple. It was the man called Mike. His eyelids were fluttering. He was recovering consciousness.

"Quick, some of you," gasped Bob, retaining his hold of the body, and holding the fellow up as a

fisherman lifts up his catch to admire it; "search him. Get his revolver."

Frank sprang to obey, being the nearest. Running his hands up and down the man's body, he was met only with disappointment. But then he felt something bulky at the belt. It was a revolver in a holster. Stripping off the weapon, he once more ran his hands over the fellow's body and, in a trousers' pocket, found a handful of bullets, which he abstracted.

Mike now began to squirm, and lash out with his heels.

"Got them?" gasped Bob.

"Yes," said Frank. "Searched him twice."

"Then back with you, Mister Mike," said Bob, dropping the other back into the hole. "We want no prisoners on our hands. And, listen," he added, "we've got your revolver. Just tell that to your friends if they get inquisitive and want to follow us."

A curse was his answer. Then they could hear Mike start to scramble back through the tunnel, and to call to his mates.

"My boy," said Captain Folsom, "I want to tell you that was one of the quickest bits of work I've ever seen. You certainly have put a different complexion on matters."

"Oh, that was just a bit of luck," said Bob. "When I heard him groan, it came to me all in a flash what to do."

"Look here," interrupted Frank, "thanks to Bob, we have stalled off pursuit. Besides, we have a revolver now. I don't feel like running off and leaving Jack. The way things have turned out, we can get away without being discovered, anyhow, so we wouldn't be drawing anybody away from Jack's trail if we did go in the opposite direction. Let's run for it before they get a chance to circle back through the tunnel and house, but head for the radio station instead of home. What say?"

"Right," said Captain Folsom. "You chaps certainly know how to use your heads. Come on."

And swinging about, he started running through the trees in the direction taken by Jack a few short minutes before.

They had not gone far, however, before another volley of revolver shots broke out behind them.

"That's at the tunnel again," said Captain Folsom, pausing to listen. "They must realize that we wouldn't stay there, so, although they will be cautious, it won't be long before they come out of the tunnel."

"Yes," said Frank, "and some of them have got-

ten out already, and are coming down from the house."

For, as he spoke, from farther back in the woods bullets began to fly. The party from the house was shooting as they came.

"I don't think they've seen us yet," said Bob. "The moon is pretty low down and these trees are thick. Anyhow, they wouldn't expect us to take this course, as it is away from our home. Come on."

The shrubbery was less dense now, thinning out, as they neared the clearing in which the radio station was located. Dashing ahead, they cleared the last of the trees and started across the clearing. As they drew nearer the station, heading for the doorway, where the outward-swinging door stood open, Jack saw the four figures in the moonlight and, believing them foes, sprang up from the seat by the instrument table, and dashed out to try to escape.

Running at top speed as he hit the sand, he started in the oposite direction. Bob, however, had an advantage Jack did not possess. He was looking for Jack at the station, and was quick to recognize the familiar figure. Jack, not expecting his friends here, naturally considered the approaching figures those of some of the smugglers.

"Hey, Jack, it's us," Bob called.

Jack knew that voice. There was no mistake.

He paused, dumbfounded, and spun about. Then he started to retrace his steps. The others, pretty well blown, slowed down their pace. As they approached, Jack called:

"I wasn't looking for you, and thought you some of the other fellows. How did you happen to change your plans and come here?"

Frank started to explain.

But this was not time for explanations. Paddy Ryan, heading a dozen of his men, had seen the four fleeing through the woods and followed. At this moment the pursuers reached the edge of the clearing. The first intimation which any of the five, engrossed in their meeting, had of the near approach of the enemy, was an outburst of bullets, some of which sang unpleasantly close while others kicked up the sand around them. None, however, took effect.

Where the others had come up with Jack was near a corner of the radio plant. All leaped for cover behind it. With a yell of triumph, Paddy Ryan jumped out into the clearing, his men at his heels.

Frank, who carried the captured revolver and spare ammunition taken from the man called Mike, realized it was distinctly up to him to halt the enemy, if possible. He did not want to shoot to kill,

although he knew that the others had no such compunctions, especially since Higginbotham must be aware that if they escaped he would be a ruined man, as they would be able to identify him. Nevertheless, the emergency demanded action.

All this passed through his mind in a twinkling. Then he peered out from behind the shelter of the radio station, took deliberate aim, and fired. The leading figure, that of Paddy Ryan, stumbled, lurched forward and fell. Some of the others in the pursuing party paused, others came on. Once more Frank fired. A second man, the foremost, fell. It was sufficient to deter the others. While some ran back helter-skelter for the shelter of the woods, others threw themselves prone in the sand, and began to shoot from that position.

"I shot them in the legs," said Frank.

His voice trembled. His legs felt weak, his hands numb. It was with an effort he refrained from dropping the revolver. Like his chums, Frank was a crack shot, for Mr. Temple early had accustomed them to the use of rifle and shotgun, and the previous summer in New Mexico Tom Bodine, their cowboy friend, had given all three valuable instructions in revolver shooting. Nevertheless, to take deliberate aim at a human being was unnerving. It was only the realization that the safety of his comrades hung

on his aim that had nerved him to the task and steeled his arm.

"Steady, old thing," said Bob, patting him on the shoulder. Then, turning to Captain Folsom, he added: "Well, captain, where do we go from here? We've got all Long Island ahead of us. I expect we had better start traveling."

"Not at all, Bob," said Jack, unexpectedly. "If we can only hold these fellows off a few minutes more, they'll get the surprise of their lives. I raised Lieutenant Summers by radio. He was close offshore by the greatest of good luck. He's sending a landing party in boats, and I was to meet them at the beach and act as guide."

CHAPTER XVII

RESCUE ARRIVES

TOM BARNUM had disappeared. Now he ran up from the rear of the radio station.

"Quick, Mister Frank, with that revolver," he said. "They've split up an' the fellows in the woods are trying to work their way around to take us in the rear. I been watchin' from the back side."

Frank nodded and started to follow. Then he spun around, ran again to his former vantage point, and sent a couple of bullets towards the figures in the sand.

"That'll hold 'em there for a minute," he said.

As he ran after Tom Barnum to the other corner of the station on the side which sheltered them, he refilled the emptied chambers of the precious weapon.

"There," said Tom Barnum, crouching low, and pointing.

Frank tried to follow directions but saw nothing. He pressed the revolver into Tom's hand.

"Don't waste time trying to show me," he said. "If you see anybody, shoot."

Tom took the weapon, glanced along the barrel, and pressed the trigger. A yell of pain was the response. Twenty yards away there was a crash in the bushes, then silence.

"Back to the other corner," said Tom, chuckling, and dashed again to the post from which Frank originally had fired.

Frank sat down, with his back against the wall of the station and laughed hysterically.

"Golly, but this is a game of hide and seek, all right," he gasped.

Again the revolver spoke, a yell followed, and then came a rain of bullets.

"Here they come," cried Tom, and in quick succession he pumped out four more shots.

Howls and shrieks of anguish rose. Tom was shooting with deadly intent. The attempted rush was halted, broken. The desperadoes composing the attacking force could not stand before that deadly aim. They broke and ran back toward the trees, leaving three figures groveling in the sand.

"One for Mister Frank, and three for me, them two and one back behind," said Tom Barnum grimly, to Bob and Jack, who were peering over his shoulder. "That ain't so bad."

A cry from Captain Folsom, followed by Frank's voice calling urgently, caused the three to spin around. They were just in time to see one man go down under a terrific blow from the doughty, one-armed officer, while Frank leaped in under the arm of a second desperado, upraised to fire, and brought him crashing down with a flying tackle.

"As pretty as I ever saw," muttered Bob. "Old Frank ought to make the All-American team for that."

Quick as thought, having felled his man, Captain Folsom stooped down and wrenched a revolver from his grasp, then spun about on his knee and fired just as a third rounded the corner. The man toppled forward. By this time Bob and Jack had reached the scene. But the attack from the rear had spent its force. The three most daring evidently had taken the lead. And the way they had been disposed of deterred the others. A half dozen in number, they hung uncertainly in a group along the wall of the radio station.

Captain Folsom helped them make up their minds as to which direction to take by sending several shots over their heads. Without even waiting to reply, they ran for cover toward the trees and bushes at the edge of the clearing.

The man whom Frank had tackled capitulated

without a struggle, seeing the fight had gone against him. Frank took his revolver. From the fellow whom Captain Folsom had shot, and who proved to be wounded only in the thigh, Bob obtained a revolver. All except Jack were now armed, and he had the butcher knife which Frank had carried away from the Brownell house, although he laughed as he flourished it.

"The way you fellows treat our friends," he said, "I expect none of them will come close enough to give me a chance to use this."

"Look here," said Captain Folsom, approaching the boys, after having ascertained first that the man whom he had shot had only a flesh wound; "we aren't out of the woods yet. These fellows are determined scoundrels, and they know they can't afford to let us escape. Finding they can't rush us, they will next try to work around through the trees and attack us from this side. I think we had better make a dash around Tom Barnum's corner and get into the radio station."

"But how about my going to the beach to meet Lieutenant Summers?" asked Jack.

"Our position ought to be evident to him," said Captain Folsom. "He can understand what is going on, and come up cautiously. I can't risk having any of you lads run the gauntlet. I've reproached

myself a hundred times already for leading you into danger."

"Nonsense, Captain," said Jack. "We volunteered. And we're safe so far, aren't we?"

The other shook his head with a smile of admiration. These boys were made of manly stuff.

"Come," said he, "there is no time to waste. Any minute we may expect to be peppered from the woods on this side. Here, you two," he added, addressing the two unwounded prisoners, "help your pal and march. We're going into the radio station."

The men, young, smooth-shaven and looking like what they were, city toughs, were cowed. Without a word, they moved to obey.

"All clear there, Tom?" asked Captain Folsom of Tom Barnum, who had kept up his watch at the forward end of the side wall.

"If we move fast we can make it," Tom replied. "There's nobody out here in front but the wounded, an' they're crawlin' to cover."

"Good," answered Captain Folsom. "Now, altogether."

A quick dash from cover, and the party was safely within the sending room of the station.

Jack's first move was to ascertain whether any of the enemy had gained entrance to the power

house. He approached the connecting door at the rear of the room. It still was closed and locked. Tom Barnum had taken up his post inside the door, which he had swung shut behind him, not, however, until Frank had found and pressed a wall button which switched on a cluster of electric lights overhead.

"Lucky for us there is no other entrance to the power house than through this door," said Jack. "At least there is none, so far as I have seen. If there had been, they might have slipped in that other room, come through here and have gotten close enough to rush us before we could have stopped them."

Captain Folsom approached Tom Barnum, after asking the boys to keep an eye on the prisoners.

"I see you are keeping watch through a crack in the door," he said. "But, I believe we would be better off with the door open entirely. That would give us a clear view of the side from which attack must come. We can push this big table across the doorway, upending it. So." And, suiting action to word, he and Tom dragged the heavy article of furniture into position. "Now let us push the door open," he said.

Just as Tom was about to comply, an outburst of shooting in the clearing split the air.

"Hurray," shouted Jack. "The 'Dry Navy' got on the job. Come on, fellows, open the door."

As Tom Barnum, who had paused in that very act, stunned by this new development, completed the task and the door swung outward, the others crowded to the barrier of the upended table.

Jack's surmise was apparently correct. Along the wall of the radio station were ranged a dozen men. They had been stealing up to pour a hot fire through the door. But Lieutenant Summers with his landing party, drawn to the clearing by the sounds of combat, had made a hurried march up from the beach, and opened fire. His men were advancing across the clearing, scattered out fanwise, crouching and shooting as they came.

Taken by surprise, the smugglers were returning only a ragged fire.

Seeing how matters stood, Captain Folsom directed the table be pulled away and then, commanding the boys to keep in the background, he and Tom Barnum stepped out to the stoop and poured the contents of their revolvers, fast as they could pump them, into the smugglers.

The surprise of the latter was complete. Caught between two fires, they did not know which way to turn. They wavered a moment, then dashed away

along the wall of the radio plant in an opposite direction from the door.

As they disappeared among the trees, pursued by a detachment of Lieutenant Summer's men, the latter with a half dozen followers dashed up to the radio plant and, in the lighted doorway, recognized the figure of his colleague, Captain Folsom.

Greetings were exchanged, and then Captain Folsom called the boys forward and introduced them.

"Plucky lads, if ever I met any," he said, warmly, "and resourceful, too. Their ingenuity has pulled us through time and again to-night."

"Not to mention," said Bob, gruffly, "that it was my darned foolishness that got us into this scrape to begin with."

"Nonsense, my boy," said Captain Folsom. "You did only what any of us would have done in jumping that rascal, Higginbotham. Well, now, let us head for the house. Probably that is where these rascals will take refuge. They must be wondering who you are, Lieutenant, and how you happened to appear on the scene."

CHAPTER XVIII

HIGGINBOTHAM ESCAPES

A HASTY marshalling of forces was first made. Besides the three boys, Captain Folsom and Tom Barnum, Lieutenant Summers had twelve men under his command. Thus they numbered eighteen in all. It was decided to split this force into two equal parties, one commanded by Lieutenant Summers, the other by Captain Folsom.

Tom Barnum went with Lieutenant Summer's party as guide, the boys with Captain Folsom. They were to move against the front and rear entrances of the house, summon those within to surrender and, if necessary, to blockade the house until surrender was made. As an afterthought, each party detached a man, as they moved up through the woods, to stand guard over the tunnel and thus prevent any who had taken refuge either therein or in the house from making their escape.

As it proved, however, when Paddy Ryan discovered he was besieged by government forces, he

surrendered without resistance, together with the half dozen men with him. The others had scattered and made their escape. And when the government forces came to take inventory of their prisoners, it was discovered that among those who had fled was Higginbotham.

"Ye'll get nothin' out of me," said Ryan sullenly, when he was questioned as to Higginbotham's whereabouts. "He beat it away. That's all I know."

Frank's quick eye, however, was caught by the gleam in Ryan's glance, and he suspected the other knew more than he would admit. Drawing his chums to one side, he said in a low voice:

"Look here, fellows, I believe Higginbotham is hiding in one of two places. Either he is up in the attic, in that secret passage through which we made our escape from the dark room, or else hiding in the tunnel."

"Maybe you're right," said Bob. "But we couldn't ferret him out alone. If he is hiding in either place, he is armed, and would have us at his mercy. A desperate man would shoot. I believe we would be foolhardy to take such a chance."

"Let's ask Captain Folsom's advice," suggested Jack, sensibly.

Waiting an opportunity, they beckoned Captain

Folsom aside and Frank propounded his suspicions. The latter looked thoughtful.

"I agree with Temple," he said, emphatically. "I am glad you boys told me of this and did not attempt to make a search by yourselves. Let me see, however, if we cannot evolve some scheme to bring the rascal out, provided he is in hiding in one or other of these places."

Facing about, he called:

"Ryan, come here."

The leader of the smugglers, who stood lined up with his men, including the negro, Mike and Pete, against the wall, under guard, stepped forward.

Quickly Captain Folsom explained his suspicions as to where Higginbotham might be in hiding. Then he added:

"Higginbotham knows your voice. I want you to go to whichever place he may be hiding and summon him to come out and surrender. Say that if he refuses, I shall not imperil the lives of any of my men by sending them to dig him out, but shall starve him into submission."

There was a slight smile of triumph on Paddy Ryan's face as he replied:

"Sure, an' I'll go to both places an' whistle in the wind. But it's in nather place he is, for he did not return to the house, I'm tellin' ye."

"Do as I say, Ryan," commanded Captain Folsom, shortly. "Try the attic first. The tunnel is guarded, I may as well tell you, and Higginbotham cannot make his escape that way."

"All right. You're the captain," said Ryan. "Follow me."

As he turned to proceed up the steps, after ordering two sailors to accompany Ryan, Captain Folsom said to the boys and Lieutenant Summers, who had joined the party:

"From the way Ryan is acting, I believe he is trying to throw us off the scent, and that Higginbotham really is hidden hereabouts."

No reply, however, was received in response to Ryan's announcement of the ultimatum laid down by Captain Folsom, both at the secret passage under the roof and the other underground.

"Very well," said Captain Folsom, lips compressed, at the failure of his stratagem. "We shall post guards here until we can decide what to do."

Ryan therefore was returned to keep company with the other prisoners under guard in the big living room. In another room the two officers, together with the boys, gathered for a consultation. Tom Barnum, meantime, seeing that dawn had come, and that the first faint streaks of daylight were beginning to light up the woods outside, left the knot

of sailors to whom he had been recounting the events of that exciting night and re-entering the house called Jack aside.

"Mister Jack," he said. "It'll be broad day in another hour. Don't you think I had better go back and tell the Temples and your housekeeper what's become of you three and of Captain Folsom, too. If they happen to notice you're missin' they'll be worried."

"Right, Tom," approved Jack. "But do you think it's safe for you to make the trip alone? Some of these fellows may be lurking in the woods."

"Oh," said Tom, "it'll soon be daylight, as I said. Besides, I'll be on the beach. And, anyhow, why should any of them attack me? They'll be runnin' like hares to get away, and none of 'em will be around here."

Thereupon Tom set out, and Jack returned to the conference. On his re-entry, he learned the two officers had decided to remove the liquor in the cellar to the beach and thence by boat to the Nark, as the easiest method for getting it to New York and the government warehouses for the storage of confiscated contraband. A sailor appointed to inspect the premises had reported finding a large truck and a narrow but sufficiently wide road through the woods to the beach. Evidently, it was by this method that

liquor had been brought from the beach to the house on occasion.

This would be a long process, but it was considered better than to attempt to remove the liquor by truck to New York. Only one truck was available, in the first place, and that would not carry more than the smallest portion of the big store of liquor.

Before the two officers departed to issue the necessary orders for the carrying out of their plans, Jack for the first time since he had had that one brief glimpse of them at the beginning of their adventure, remembered the torpedo-shaped metal objects on the beach and spoke about them.

"I am quite sure they must be great containers controlled by radio," he said. "Probably they were launched from a liquor ship well out to sea, and then brought to shore by radio. I suppose Higginbotham directed the current, although it might have been that thug with him whom you first attacked, Bob. That fellow who said it was he had damaged the airplane. Remember?"

"By George, yes," said Bob, starting up, a vengeful expression on his face. "And that reminds me. Where is that particular ruffian, I'd like to know. He isn't among the prisoners."

"Maybe, he's among the wounded," suggested

Jack. "A half dozen have been gathered up, none seriously wounded, and are out in the kitchen where that apprentice surgeon is fixing them up."

He referred to one of the sailors, a medical student who because of ill health had enlisted in the "Dry Navy" in order to obtain an outdoor life. Lieutenant Summers earlier had assigned him to look after the injured. Despite all the shooting that had taken place, none of the sailors had been wounded, and the boys, Captain Folsom and Tom represented, with their injuries from blows, the sole casualties in the government forces. Of the half dozen smugglers injured, moreover, none had been shot other than in the arms or legs. As Lieutenant Summers had explained to the boys, even in pitched battle a good deal of powder and shot was spent often without anybody being injured.

Bob made hasty examination of the kitchen and returned to report the man he sought could not be located. He found Jack and Frank awaiting him, the officers having departed to see about preparations for moving the liquor.

"Believe me, if I could find that fellow," grunted Bob, and he did not finish the sentence.

"Well," said Jack, looking out of the window, "it's daylight now. Let's go down and have a look at those torpedo things on the beach. Then we can

take a plunge and go home. I'm beginning to feel let down now, and I could sleep the clock around."

The others agreed, and passing through the living room made their way outdoors and headed for the beach. Frank stopped suddenly, and emitted an exclamation of disgust.

"We're a fine crowd," he said. "Why hasn't one of us thought of that radio-controlled airplane before? What's become of it?"

"Oh, I guess it's somewhere along shore in Starfish Cove," said Jack. "We'll soon see."

But arrival at the beach failed to disclose the tiny speedster of the sky. Only the great metal objects lay outstretched above the tide, like so many seal basking in the sun. The disappearance of the plane was temporarily forgotten, while they investigated. As they had surmised, these objects proved to be liquor containers, from several of which the cases of bottled liquor in the holds had not yet been removed. They were replicas of each other. At the rounded end was a propeller driven by an electric motor. A rudder governed by an electric compass imparted direction. A wire trailing overside and a spiral aerial coiled upright about a mast completed the mechanism.

"Mighty ingenious," declared Jack, inspecting one of the contrivances. "And it must have cost a pretty

sum to build it, too. These liquor smugglers certainly must have money behind them. Until we became involved in this business, I had no idea except in a general way that all this was going on, certainly no idea that it was organized as it is."

While Jack and Bob bent above the radio boats, absorbed in examination of them, Frank pursued further search for the missing radio-controlled airplane. Presently he rejoined his comrades with the information that it was to be found nowhere along the shore and that apparently it had not drifted away, as at first he had suspected might have been the case, because the sun had risen now and except for the Nark and her two boats drawn upon shore, there was nothing in sight.

Suddenly, as he concluded his report, another idea came to Frank and he laughed aloud.

"What's the joke?" demanded Bob. "Have you done ——"

"No, sir," Frank interrupted, "I've not gone crazy, at least not any more than the rest of you. It just occurred to me that the reason why we couldn't find Higginbotham links up with the reason why his airplane is missing. Higginbotham flew away in it, while that plugugly who damaged our airplane and whom Bob couldn't locate worked the radio for him."

"You mean he had the nerve to come back here while we were up at the house? And that his man calmly walked into the radio plant and operated it for him? Oh, say." Bob was contemptuous.

"Why not?" said Frank coolly. "What was to stop him? The airplane makes no noise, and it would be the easiest matter in the world for Higginbotham thus to make his escape."

CHAPTER XIX

WARNED!

FRANK'S surmise was communicated to Captain Folsom, and the latter at once sent a radio message to the Custom House at New York, giving a bare outline of the details of the raid and asking that a watch be kept for Higginbotham. Custom House communicated with the New York Police Department, and a guard was set at the bridges and ferries leading from Long Island to Manhattan.

Several days elapsed, however, with Higginbotham still uncaught. Meanwhile the next day after that eventful night, the radio-controlled plane was found floating in the waters of Great South Bay, so near the shore as to make it practically impossible Higginbotham had been drowned but, on the contrary, to give rise to the belief that he had made his way ashore. A fisherman made the discovery.

It was some twenty-five miles as the crow flies from the Brownell place to the point where the air-

plane came down. That, Jack estimated, when told of the discovery, probably was the limit of the radio plant's radius of control. Higginbotham, therefore, had not descended until compelled to do so.

All this, however, did not come until later. Meanwhile, after saying farewell to the two officers, the boys returned afoot to their homes with the understanding on Jack's part that Captain Folsom, the main portion of whose wardrobe still was at his house, would return later. On arrival, Jack learned that Tom Barnum already had explained the reason for his absence to the housekeeper and, after telling her Captain Folsom should be shown to his room on arrival, turned in and went instantly to sleep.

As for Bob and Frank, only the servants as yet were astir at the Temple home. And the boys, after stating only that they had been routed out by a fire at the airplane hangar, went instantly to bed.

Once Bob was partially awakened by Della, who demanded indignantly if he intended to sleep his young life away and commanded that he awaken Frank in order that she and her guest might have company. Bob merely grunted unintelligibly, and Della retired in a high state of indignation, resolved to give the boys a "piece of her mind" when finally they should arise.

That event, however, did not come to pass until

mid-afternoon. Bob on his sister's departure the first time had gotten up and locked the doors of his room and that of Frank, which adjoined. Thus, although Della several times came to the door and knocked, she received no reply.

The "piece of her mind," however, went undelivered when once the boys did arise, for in the absorbing story which they had to tell of the night's occurrences, her sense of injury evaporated speedily. The recital occupied considerable time. At its conclusion, Bob, who had been looking so frequently at Della's guest, Marjorie Faulkner, as to cause Frank to chuckle to himself, suggested they play tennis. But Della protested.

"That's all we've had to do to-day while you boys slept," she said. "We're tired of tennis. Propose something else."

"The airplane's out of commission, or I'd take you up for a flight," said Bob. "Wouldn't you like that, Miss Faulkner?"

"Oh, wouldn't I, just," she exclaimed. "I've never been up in an airplane, and I'm dying to try it. What is it like? Does it make you sick?"

Bob grinned. Before he could reply, Frank interrupted.

"Say, Bob," he exclaimed, "we ought to telephone the factory over in Long Island City right away,

and tell them to send a couple of mechanics over here with new wings and whatever else is needed. First, though, we ought to make a thorough inventory to see what we need."

Bob agreed, and, accompanied by the girls, they repaired to the hangar. After returning to the house, Frank rang up the airplane factory, and gave the necessary orders. He was told the mechanics would arrive the next day with all that was required, but that putting the plane into condition would take three or four days at the least.

"Just when I had it all in good shape for flying," mourned Bob, on his chum's return. "Oh, what I'd do to that little monkey, Higginbotham, if I had the chance."

He grinned as he uttered the threat, yet it could be seen that he was badly cut up by the damaging of the plane. Frank said nothing, but threw an arm over his shoulder as they walked back to the house, and for the remainder of the journey neither had much to say, leaving it to the girls to carry the burden of conversation.

Arrived at the house, they found Jack with Captain Folsom. The latter was introduced to the girls, whom he had not met on his arrival the night previous.

"I've come to say good-bye," he explained to Bob

and Frank. "I have to go back to the city, and Hampton is going to motor me to the railway. I can't thank you fellows enough for your part in this affair. If it hadn't been for your perspicacity, in the first place, we might not have gotten wind of what was going on. And the way you all fought and acted on your own initiative time and again when we were in trouble was fine, indeed."

"You've got to come down again, Captain," said big Bob, on whom the other had made a favorable impression.

"I'd be delighted to do so, sometime," Captain Folsom replied.

"By the way, Captain," interposed Frank, "keep us posted, will you, on how this affair turns out? Let us know if Higginbotham is located."

"I'll do that," the other promised. "Well, good-bye."

And bowing to the girls, he crossed the lawn to Jack's side and the two swung down the drive to where Jack had left the car parked by the side of the main road at the gate.

On Jack's return, he informed his chums that the liquor at the Brownell place had been removed to the Nark, the captives placed aboard, and that then Lieutenant Summers had steamed away, leaving a detail of men on guard at the house and the radio plant

to round up any of the smugglers who, thinking the place deserted, might straggle back.

"He gave me a bit of advice to be passed on to you fellows," Jack added, out of hearing of the girls. "That was, to go about armed for a time, and to be on guard."

"Why?" asked Bob, in surprise.

"Well," Jack replied, "he said some of those fellows who escaped into the woods undoubtedly would have it in for us for having spoiled their plans, and that it was barely possible they might have learned where we live and might try to waylay us. He pointed out the men were a desperate lot, and that some of them were Italians who are notoriously revengeful."

"Huh," grunted Bob, contemptuously.

Frank, however, showed anxiety.

"That's all right, Bob," he commented. "But Captain Folsom wouldn't have given Jack that warning if there were no grounds for it. Look here, Jack," he added, "Uncle George won't be home tonight. Have you heard from your father?"

"The housekeeper received a message while I slept that he wouldn't be out for several days," Jack replied.

"Well," said Frank, "I believe it would be a good plan for you to sleep at our house. At any rate

until your father returns home. You can bunk in with me. I've got a big bed. Then, if anything happens at night, we'll all be together."

"All right, I'll do that," Jack agreed. "Not that I expect anything will occur. But, as you say, if there is trouble, it is best to be together. Well, now let's join the girls. We've still got some daylight left, and we might make up doubles for tennis."

CHAPTER XX

OUT FOR REVENGE

After dinner, which the five young people ate without the presence of their elders, as even Mrs. Temple was absent, having been picked up in a friend's motor car during the afternoon and whisked away to a country home near Southampton, all adjourned to the gallery. A desultory conversation was maintained, but presently at a whisper from Frank, Della slipped indoors with him. Then from the long french windows of the music room came two voices mingling harmoniously in the strains of an old Southern melody to an accompaniment played by Della on the piano.

The others listened until the conclusion which they greeted with spirited applause. Then by common consent all three arose and went in to join. Thereafter for an hour, the singing continued, with first Della and then Miss Faulkner at the piano.

When the common repertoire of songs had been nigh exhausted, Bob who had wandered off to a window and stood there in the breeze, looking out

at the play of moonlight on the lawn, returned with a suggestion that they all go for a short spin in the motor boat. The others eagerly assented. What a lark. A spin in a speed boat under the moonlight.

Wraps and sweaters were procured, for although the night was warm it would be cool on the water, especially if any speed were attained. Then the party set out, Jack and Bob squiring Miss Faulkner, and Frank slightly in the rear with Della.

On the walk to the boathouse Della reproached Frank for having taken so many risks the previous night. He regarded her slyly.

"But Jack and Bob took risks, too," he said.

Della flushed. Was the young rascal intimating her interest in him was greater than in the others. She was about to reply tartly, but Frank awkwardly took her hand and squeezed it, then hurriedly released it again. Demonstrations of affection were not frequent between these two, yet they had a pretty good understanding. They walked on in silence.

"Just the same, Frank," said Della presently, "you must take better care of yourself."

Frank nodded. He did not trust himself to speak. The interest shown by this girl with whom he had grown up, living in the same household with her from early boyhood, threw him into a softened mood. Then, too, the moonlit surroundings were not with-

out their effect. He knew that if he spoke now, he would say something "soft." So he maintained his silence.

The trio ahead meanwhile chattered gaily. And at length the boathouse was reached. Bob swung back the door and, all pushing together, the boat was trundled out on its little trucks, removed to the chute in which rollers were set, and rolled down to the water and launched. Then all climbed in, Bob examined the fuel supply and found the boat well stocked, Jack seized the tiller, they seated themselves in the little cockpit and, with Bob manipulating the engine, the boat moved away, gathered speed and, with a roar, began zipping out to sea.

It was glorious sport, to which four of the five were accustomed, but which they enjoyed enormously no matter how often engaged in. To Miss Faulkner it was a revelation, and bundled in a sweater, her hair loosed and flying back in the wind, her eyes dancing with the zest of the adventure, she looked like an elf, as Della told Frank in a whispered aside. Frank nodded and grinned.

"Bob thinks so, too," he whispered in reply. "He can't keep his eyes off her. If we didn't have the whole sea ahead of us, he'd run into something sure."

Up and up and up went the speedometer. The boat seemed no longer to be rushing through the

water. It spurned that heavier element, and took to the air. It leaped from crest to crest of the swells. The girls shrieked, the boys let out great chesty whoops of pure animal delight. Then Bob cut down the speed and Jack, controlling the tiller, swung her about towards home. They had been out only half an hour, but the shore was miles away. However, the return was made without incident or trouble of any kind, the motor working perfectly, and once more they stepped ashore at the boat landing.

"Which do you like best, Mr. Temple," asked Marjorie Faulkner, as big Bob rejoined the party on the landing, after locking the doors; "boating, flying or motoring?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Bob, "there's something fascinating about every one of the three. To feel that powerful engine under your control, that's what grips me. It's power, you know; you have vast power under your control. They're all good," he concluded, with a quick look at the others who were moving away, "but to-night I like boating best."

He looked at her so pointedly that her eyes dropped. Then she laughed.

"And think of you saying that," she declared. "Why, Della always told me you were a perfect bear and never made a pretty speech to a girl in your life."

"Neither did I," said Bob, boldly, "before to-night."

Once more the girl laughed as she danced away after the others, but Bob following her was sure he had not displeased.

Events of the previous night were far from the thoughts of any of the boys, as they moved across the open sandhills along the beach and approached the grove separating them from the Temple home. There was no thought of danger in their minds.

But barely had they entered the narrow trail, walking single file, Jack in the lead, followed by Frank, Della and Miss Faulkner, with Bob bringing up the rear, than from the trees on either side darted a number of men who sprang upon them. The girls screamed in fright and alarm, their shrieks rending the silence of the night.

Cursing, several of the attackers sprang for them, too, they were seized, and rough hands clapped over their mouths.

But, attacked thus unexpectedly though they were, and without weapons, the boys fought desperately. How many their assailants numbered they could not tell. There was no time to take account. Frank was bowled over by the sudden rush, Jack borne back against a tree, Bob managed to keep his footing, his arms wrapped about the body of his own assailant.

Every muscle and nerve taut, Frank sprang up as if actuated by a spring, tripped the man who had attacked him and leaped towards the fellow who had Della in his arms. In falling, his hand had come in contact with a stone the size of his fist and he had clutched it. Della's assailant had seized her from the rear and was bending her backward, a hand across her mouth. His back was towards Frank. The latter brought down the stone on the man's head with a tremendous crash, and the fellow's arms relaxed, setting Della free, then he fell to the ground, stunned.

The man whom he had tripped made a leap for Frank, but his blood up, the boy dodged aside to avoid the blind rush and, as the man lurched past, he lashed out with his right fist. The blow caught the other under the ear, a fatal spot, and sent him toppling to the ground.

Meantime, Jack, with his back to a big tree, was hard pressed by two men. In the hand of one gleamed a dagger. Good boxer though he was, Jack could not ward off an attack like that for long, and Frank realized it. He sprang forward to go to the rescue. Then a blow on the head felled him, and all became darkness.

That blow came from a blackjack in the hands of Marjorie Faulkner's assailant. Seeing the danger to his comrades from Frank, he released the girl

and attacked Frank. But his act brought down on him a perfect fury, tearing, scratching at his face. It was Della, crying with rage at the danger to Frank, insensible to everything else. She was a whirlwind and the man had all he could do to ward her off. In fact, he did not fully succeed, for her hands found his face and her tearing fingers ripped a long gash down over his right eye, from which the blood began to spout. Temporarily blinded, he dropped his blackjack, and stumbled back, cursing.

Della did not follow up her advantage, but dropped to her knees beside Frank and pillowed his head in her lap. His eyes were closed. The blow that had felled him had been a shrewd one. Fortunately, however, instead of descending full on his head, it had glanced off one side. As she cradled him, smoothing back his hair and crying unrestrainedly, Frank opened his eyes and gazed up.

For a moment his daze continued. Or did it? Was there not a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes, quickly veiled, as he saw who had come to his rescue?

Then he started to struggle to his feet.

All this had taken very little time and, while it progressed, Bob had been gripped body to body with the biggest of the attacking party, a husky fellow of his own six foot height but with the added weight of a greater length of years. As this man leaped for

him from the woods, arm upraised with a blackjack clutched in his hand, Bob had seized the descending wrist and thrown his other arm about the fellow's body. Thus they had wrestled.

As Frank shakily, with Della's assistance, was getting to his feet, there came a panting cry from Bob, another scream from Miss Faulkner. Then through the air went flying the form of Bob's assailant. He had fallen victim to Bob's famous wrestling grip, which lifted the man from his feet and sent him flying over Bob's head. But into the propulsion this time Bob put all his great strength. The result was that, instead of falling immediately behind Bob, the fellow cannoned through the air a distance of several yards.

As luck would have it, this human meteor descended upon one of Jack's assailants, and the pair went down to the ground together. At this, the other man turned and fled incontinently into the woods.

The first round had been won. But there were still five assailants left. And all armed, while the boys were without weapons. Frank saw the danger of delay and called:

"Bob, Jack, quick. We must get the girls home."

Shaking his head to clear it, he seized Della by the hand and started running towards the house. A

glance sufficed to show him the others saw the danger of delay, and were pelting after him with Marjorie Faulkner. Bob was bringing up the rear.

But their troubles were not ended. Thus far the attackers had refrained from using revolvers in order to avoid bringing others to the scene. But, seeing their prey escape, several now whipped out weapons and began to fire.

Bob, the last in line, groaned:

"Got me."

He fell. Jack spun around, took in the situation, then called:

"Girls, you run on home and get help. Frank and I will stay with Bob."

"I'm not hurt much," Bob declared. Just put my leg out."

He struggled to regain his feet.

Several more shots whistled unpleasantly close. Their assailants were approaching, shooting as they came.

"Run, girls," cried Jack.

They darted away.

Suddenly Tom Barnum came crashing through the woods, service revolver gripped in his hand. He had been aroused, as he slept nearby at the Hampton radio plant, by the cries of the girls on first being attacked. In the moonlight, it was not difficult to

see at which party to fire, and Tom did not hesitate. He sent a half dozen bullets whistling about the attacking party in quick succession. The arrival of reinforcements completed the discomfiture of the latter. They fled back towards the beach.

Tom was all for pursuing them, but Jack called to him.

"Here, Tom, let 'em go. Bob's hurt. Help us get him to the house."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MOTOR BOAT STOLEN

When the boys and Tom Barnum arrived at the Temples', they found the household in a great state of excitement. Some of the maids were hysterical. But Frank and Della, with a few sharp-spoken words, shamed the women and brought them to their senses. However, it was not to be wondered at that hysteria prevailed, as there were few men about to give protection in case of an attack on the house, the butler being an oldish and timorous man and the chauffeur absent.

Frank assured the women, however, that they need not fear attack, and they retired to the servant's quarters.

Meantime, Jack and Tom Barnum had assisted Bob to his rooms and examined his injury. It was found he had been struck by bullets not only once but twice. In neither case, however, was the injury serious. One had creased his right thigh, the other

pierced the calf without touching the bone. The wounds were bandaged and dressed.

Then a consultation was held, which both Della and Marjorie Faulkner insisted on attending. Both had been thoroughly frightened, but were plucky spirits, and the boys were loud in praise of their behavior. Frank could not thank Della enough for her interference to save him from the ruffian who had felled him.

It was decided that, due to their isolation and the nature of the country, it would be highly unwise as well as unprofitable to attempt to go in search of the ruffians. Tom Barnum, however, was instructed to send a warning by radio to the government men at the Brownell radio plant that these fellows were in the neighborhood, and this commission he duly carried out on his return to his quarters.

The boys were of the opinion that they had seen the last of the smugglers, and that, thwarted in their attempt to gain revenge, the latter would now make their way to the railroad and return to Brooklyn and Manhattan. For that the attack upon them was caused by a desire to obtain revenge, they had no doubt. It was what Captain Folsom had told them they might expect.

What was their dismay, however, the next day when, on arriving at the boathouse they discovered

the door broken open, and the new speed boat, pride of the trio, gone. Bob who had hobbled along by the aid of a cane groaned as he stared at the vacant space where the boat had been stowed on their return the night before.

"We're out of luck," he said. "That's all."

"Airplane damaged, motor boat stolen," said Frank. "What next?"

But Jack refused to lament. His eyes blazed with wrath.

"This is too much," he said. "We'll have to do something about this. That's all."

After a consultation, it was decided to call Captain Folsom by radio at the Custom House and apprise him of the latest turn in the situation. By great good luck, Captain Folsom was in the Custom House at the time, on business connected with the disposal of the vast amount of liquor taken from the Brownell house. He commiserated with the boys on their hard luck, as well as on their lucky escape the previous night when unexpectedly attacked.

He promised to notify the New York police who would keep a lookout for the motor boat along both the Brooklyn and Manhattan water fronts. Furthermore, he agreed to undertake to notify the police authorities of towns along the Long Island shore between the Temple estate and the metropolis, so that

in case the smugglers made a landing and abandoned the boat, the boys would be notified where to recover it.

In conclusion, he added that the big raid and the arrest of Paddy Ryan and others at the Brownell house had not as yet brought to light the principals in the liquor-smuggling ring. The lesser prisoners, questioned separately, maintained that Ryan and Higginbotham were the sole principals known to them. Higginbotham had not been found, and Ryan refused to talk. It was Captain Folsom's opinion, however, that one or more men of wealth and, possibly, of social or financial position, were behind the plot.

"You boys have been of such assistance," he said, "that I'm telling you this, first, because I know you will be interested, but, secondly, because I want to put you on the lookout. You have shown yourselves such sensible, clever fellows that, if you keep your ears open, who knows but what you will stumble on something of importance. I believe the man or men behind the plot may live in the 'Millionaire Colony' down your way."

What Captain Folsom had told the boys opened a new line for thought, and they discussed the matter at some length after finishing the radio conversation. The girls also were keenly interested.

"It's so romantic," said Della. "Just like the olden days when smuggling was a recognized industry in England, for instance, and big merchants holding positions of respectability and honor connived with the runners of contraband."

"You needn't go that far from home," said Frank, a student of Long Island colonial history. "There was a time when, on both coasts of Long Island, pirates and smugglers made their headquarters and came and went unmolested. In fact, the officials of that day were in league with the rascals, and there was at least one governor of the Province of New York who feathered his nest nicely by having an interest in both kinds of ventures."

The boys knew the names of most of the owners of great estates along the Long Island shore up to Southampton and beyond, and some time was spent in laughing speculation as to whether this or that great man was involved in the liquor-smuggling plot.

"Captain Folsom said," explained Jack, "that so much money necessarily was involved in the purchase and movement of all that liquor, in the radio equipment, the buying of the Brownell place, the hiring of ships, the employment of many men, and so on, that he was pretty certain the men captured were only underlings and not principals. And, certainly, the business must have taken a great deal of money."

Several days passed without the boys hearing further from Captain Folsom, nor was any word received that their motor boat had been recovered. They came to be of the opinion that it had been either scuttled or abandoned in some lonely spot upon which nobody had stumbled, or else that the thieves had managed to elude police vigilance in the harbor of New York. That the thieves might have used it to make their way to sea to a rendezvous where the ships of the liquor-smugglers' fleet gathered did not occur to them, for the reason that despite the knowledge they had gained of the contraband traffic they were not aware as yet of its extent. Yet such was what actually had happened, as events were to prove.

Meantime, both Mr. Temple and Mr. Hampton returned to their homes, to be amazed at the tale of developments during their absence. Over their cigars in Mr. Hampton's library, the two, alone, looked at each other and smiling shook their heads.

"I had to scold Jack for running his head into trouble," said Mr. Hampton. "But—well, it's great to be young, George, and to have adventure come and hunt you out."

Mr. Temple nodded.

"I gave Bob and Frank a talking-to," he commented. "Told them they had no business getting into trouble the minute my back was turned. But

Bob said: 'Well, Dad, we got into trouble when your back wasn't turned, too, out there in California last year. And we got you out of it, as a matter of fact.' And Frank said: 'We manage to come out on top, Uncle George.' "

Mr. Hampton laughed.

"Jack said something of the sort to me, too," he said. "He recalled that it was only by putting his head into trouble, as I called it, that he managed to rescue me when I was a prisoner in Mexico and to prevent international complications."

"It's great to be young," said Mr. Temple, looking at the glowing tip of his cigar.

Both men smoked in silence.

Sunday came and went without further developments. But on the next day, Monday, the fifth day after the momentous night at the Brownell place, Captain Folsom called the boys by radio. Tom Barnum, on duty at the plant, summoned Jack. The latter presently appeared at the Temple home in a state of high excitement.

"Say, fellows," he cried, spying his chums sprawled out on the gallery, reading; "what would you say to a sea voyage, with a chance for a little excitement?"

Frank dropped his book and rolled out of the hammock in which he was swaying lazily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, scrambling to his feet.

"Yes," said Bob, who was comfortably sprawled out in a long low wicker chair; "what's it all about?"

He heaved a cushion at Jack, which the latter caught and returned so quickly that it caught Bob amidships and brought him to feet with a bound. He winced a little. His injured leg, although well on the road to recovery, was not yet in a condition to withstand sudden jolting.

"Ouch," he roared. "Sic 'em, Frank."

"Let up," declared Jack, warding off the combined attacks of his two chums, who began belaboring him with cushions; "let up, or I'll keep this to myself."

The pair fell back, but with cushions still held aloft menacingly.

"If it isn't good," said Frank, "look out."

"Well, this is good, all right," said Jack, and hurriedly he explained. Captain Folsom was about to set out from New York with Lieutenant Summers aboard the Nark to investigate reports that a veritable fleet of liquor-smuggling vessels was some miles out to sea off Montauk Point, the very tip of Long Island. On their way, they would stop off at the Brownell place and send a boat ashore with a change of guards to relieve those on duty. They would be

at the rendezvous in the course of the next three hours.

"Captain Folsom said," concluded Jack, "that it had occurred to him the smugglers who stole our motor boat might have made out to this fleet, and invited us to go along to identify the boat in case it was found. He said there was just a bare chance of its being located, and he didn't want to arouse our hopes unduly. Also, he added that there would be no danger, and he thought we would enjoy the outing. This time, however, he said, he would not take us unless by the permission of our parents. If that could be obtained, we should make our way to the Brownell place and the boat would pick us up."

"Hurray," cried Frank, executing a war dance. "Whoo-oo-oo-oo-oo!"

"Call up your father, Bob," said Jack, "and ask him. I'll run home and get my Dad on the long distance."

Both boys hastened to execute the commission, and when Jack returned in an incredibly short time it was with his father's permission to make the trip. Mr. Temple proved similarly amiable. Both men felt there could be no danger to the boys on such an expedition, as it was altogether unlikely that any liquor-runners would make a stand against an armed vessel of the United States Navy. Also, they were

struck by Captain Folsom's reasoning as to the possible whereabouts of the motor boat and, knowing how the boys were put out at the loss, they felt it was only fair to the chums to permit them to run down this clue.

"It's a good three miles to Starfish Cove," said Jack, anxiously. "Can you make it all right on that bum leg, Bob?"

For answer Bob swung the wounded member back and forth several times. "I'll hold out all right," he said. "If I can't make it all the way, you fellows can carry me. I'm only a slight load."

Frank groaned in mock dismay.

The girls had gone visiting with Mrs. Temple. So, leaving a note to explain their absence, the boys set out.

CHAPTER XXII

WORD OF A STRANGE CRAFT

PICKED up by the boat at Starfish Cove, to which Bob had made his way without suffering any great inconvenience, the boys were rowed to the Nark where they were greeted on deck by Captain Folsom and Lieutenant Summers.

At once the speedy craft got under way again, and was soon edging seaward yet with the low coast line on her bow, a creaming smother of water under her forefoot. Lieutenant Summers, after greeting the boys pleasantly, returned to his duties. Leaning over the rail with them, Captain Folsom began to speak of the liquor smugglers.

No trace had been found of Higginbotham, he said. Inquiry had been made at the McKay Realty Company offices, but Mr. McKay who was said to be out of the city on business, had not yet returned, and nobody else could be found who could give any information of Higginbotham's haunts. It was learned he led a bachelor existence and had rooms

at a downtown apartment hotel. The hotel had been visited, but Higginbotham had not put in an appearance nor called by telephone.

A search warrant had been obtained and the rooms entered and inspected. But no papers of any sort that would give a clue to Higginbotham's connections in the liquor traffic were found. A canny man, he had avoided keeping any such incriminating documents about. Ryan and the other prisoners had been released on bail, Ryan himself putting up the bond money which amounted to a large sum.

"If only I could lay my hands on the principals behind this plot," said Captain Folsom, thoughtfully. "The liquor smuggling is growing, and there is every evidence that some organizing genius with a great deal of money at his command is behind it. The newest manifestation of the smugglers' activities came the other day when an airplane which fell into a field near Croton-on-Hudson and was abandoned by the aviator, who was unhurt, was found to have carried 200 bottles of expensive Canadian liquor. And a map of the route from an island in the St. Lawrence near Montreal to Glen Falls, New York, thence to New York City was found in the cockpit. It was well-thumbed, and showed the trip must have been made many times of late."

"But, if you do catch the principal, won't that

merely result in curtailing activities of the smugglers for the time being, but not in putting a permanent stop to them?" asked Frank. "Aren't the profits so large that somebody else with money, some other organizing genius as you say, will take up the work?"

"Perhaps, you are right," said Captain Folsom. "This prohibition law has brought to pass a mighty queer state of affairs in our country. It is one law that many people feel no compunctions at violating. Nevertheless, I feel that behind all these liquor violations in and around New York City to-day there is a man of prominence, someone who has united most of the small operators under his control, and who virtually has organized a Liquor Smugglers' Trust.

"If we can land that man," he added, "we will strike a blow that will deter others for a long time to come from trying to follow his example. And I have the feeling that the events which you boys precipitated will lead us to that man—the Man Higher Up."

So interested were the boys in this conversation that they failed to note the near approach of the Nark to an ancient schooner. They stood gazing at the creaming water under the bow, caps pulled low over their eyes to protect them from the sun's glare, and their radius of vision was strictly limited. Now,

however, the speed of the Nark sensibly diminished until, when they looked up in surprise and gazed around to see what was occurring, the boys found the Nark practically at a standstill while a cable's length away rode an ancient schooner, lumbering along under all sail, to take advantage of the light airs.

"By the ring-tailed caterpillar," exclaimed Frank, employing a quaint expression current the last term at Harrington Hall, "where did that caravel of Columbus come from? Why, she's so old you might expect the Ancient Mariner to peer over her rail. Yes, and there he is."

He pointed at the figure of a whiskered skipper, wearing a dingy derby, who peered over the rail at this moment in response to a hail from the Nark.

There was some foundation, in truth, for Frank's suggestion. The old schooner whose name they now discerned in faded gilt as "Molly M," seemed like a ghost of other days. Her outthrust bow, her upcocked stern and the figurehead of a simpering woman that might have been mermaid originally but was now so worn as to make it almost impossible to tell the original intent, was, indeed, suggestive of galleons of ancient days. This figurehead jutted out beneath the bowsprit.

"Heh. Heh."

As the skipper of the ancient craft thus responded to the hail from the Nark, he put a hand to his ear as if hard of hearing.

"Lay to. U. S. patrol boat," returned Lieutenant Summers, impatiently.

"Evidently our friend believes we have come up with a liquor smuggler," said Captain Folsom, in an aside, to the boys.

But the old skipper, whose craft was drawing away while the Nark rocked idly in the swell, with her engines barely turning over, merely repeated his gesture of putting a hand to his ear, and once more called:

"Heh. Heh."

Suddenly the deck beneath the feet of the boys quivered slightly, there was the report of a three-pounder, and a shot fell across the bow of the old schooner, kicking up a feather of spray. The Ancient Mariner, as Frank had dubbed him, came to life. He danced up and down on his deck, where two or three other figures of seamen now appeared. He shook his fist at the Nark.

"I'm outside the three-mile limit," he screamed. "I'll have the law on ye."

"He means," explained Captain Folsom to the boys, "that he is beyond the jurisdiction of United States waters and on the open sea."

Nevertheless, the old skipper barked out an order, sailors sprang to obey, sails came down, and the schooner lay hove to. Then the Nark approached until only a boat's length away. On the deck of the schooner, only the skipper stood. The seamen had gone below, their tasks completed.

"Look here, my man," said Lieutenant Summers, "you may be outside the three-mile limit, but you are drawing the line pretty fine. What are your papers?"

The old skipper looked at him shrewdly, quizzically, from out his ambush of whiskers. A slow grin broke over his features.

"Ye know well as I we'm outside the three-mile limit," he said. "So I don't mind tellin' ye. I got liquor aboard. But my papers is all clear, an' ye can't touch me. I'm from Nassau in the Bahamas for St. John. Two British possessions. An' I'm on my course."

Lieutenant Summers's face grew red. Captain Folsom's eyes twinkled, and the boys saw one of the Nark's crew, an old salt, put up a big palm to hide a smile.

"The old shellback has our skipper," whispered Captain Folsom to the boys. "He has him on the hip. We are outside the three-mile limit, undoubtedly. To think of the old Yankee's spunk in telling us he has liquor aboard. His papers will be as he says,

too, but just the same that liquor will never reach St. John. It is destined for a landing on our own coast."

Lieutenant Summers also was of the opinion apparently that he had been foiled. And little as he relished the fact that the old skipper was laughing at him up his sleeve, there was naught he could do about it. However, he decided to pay a visit to the "Molly M," for he called:

"Stand by to receive a boat. I am coming aboard."

Presently, the boys saw the little boat dancing over the waves, then Lieutenant Summers climbed to the deck of the schooner, and he and the old skipper disappeared together down the companionway.

Awaiting his return, Captain Folsom enlightened the boys about the difficulties of preventing liquor from being smuggled into the country.

"As you can see from this instance," he said, "the traffic is carried on openly, or under only a thin coating of camouflage. That boat fully intends, no doubt, to land its cargo along our coast somewhere. But her papers are all in order and as long as she stays outside the three-mile limit we can do nothing about it. Of course, we can hang to her heels and prevent her from landing. But while we are doing that, other smugglers slip ashore somewhere else. It's a weary business to try and enforce such a law

at first. And, what makes it harder," he concluded, his brow clouding, "is that every now and then some member of the enforcement service sells out to the liquor ring, and then the rest of us who are doing our work honestly and as best we can are given a black eye, for everybody says: 'Ah, yes, they're all crooks. I thought so."

"But here," he said, "is Lieutenant Summers returning. Now we shall see what he found out."

The old skipper and the naval officer appeared on the schooner's deck, Lieutenant Summers went overside, and the boat returned with him. Once more the schooner put on sail, and began to draw away. When he reached the deck, Lieutenant Summers sent a sailor to summon Captain Folsom and the boys below. They joined him in the cabin.

"I have news for you boys," said Lieutenant Summers, at once. "Captain Woolley of the 'Molly M' proved to be a pretty smooth article," and he smiled wryly, "but from a member of his crew, one of my men learned that a speed boat answering the description of your stolen craft had been seen alongside a sub chaser manned by a crew in naval uniform off Atlantic Highlands on the Jersey coast."

"Hurray," cried Frank, "one of your fleet must have recaptured it."

Lieutenant Summers shook his head.

"That's the puzzling thing," he said. "If one of our boats had found your craft adrift or captured it with the fugitive smugglers aboard, I would have been notified by radio. You see, the schooner sighted the sub chaser and motor boat yesterday. This sailor, a talkative chap apparently, told my man they thought the chaser was a ship of the 'Dry Navy' and crowded on all canvas to edge away from dangerous company. Then, he said, they could see these uniformed men aboard the chaser leaning on the rail and holding their sides from laughing at the schooner. What it all meant, he didn't know, but at any rate the chaser made no attempt to pursue."

"And you haven't heard from any of your fleet that our boat was recovered?" asked Jack, in surprise.

"From none," said Lieutenant Summers. "However, I shall order 'Sparks' at once to query all the ships.'

CHAPTER XXIII

IN STARFISH COVE AGAIN

"SPARKS" as the radio operator aboard the sub chaser was known, sat down to his key at once and sent out a wireless call for all members of the "Dry Navy", requesting information as to whether any had recovered the stolen speed boat belonging to the boys.

One by one, from their various stations along the coast, the boats responded, giving negative replies. Several hours elapsed before all had been heard from. Meantime the Nark crisscrossed and quartered the sea off Montauk Point, in search of the rumored "fleet" of liquor runners, but without success. Numerous sail were sighted as well as steamers, but the latter were all so large as to preclude in the opinion of the revenue men the possibility of their being liquor carriers, and the former never stood close enough to be examined. Nor did any assemblage of vessels sufficiently large to warrant the designation "fleet" appear.

Late in the day, when the low descending sun warned of the approach of nightfall, and the boys' watches showed 7 o'clock, Lieutenant Summers again consulted with Captain Folsom, who presently rejoined the boys with word that they were going to turn back and cruise offshore and that the boys in an hour or two could be landed, not at Starfish Cove, but at their own boathouse, thus involving only a short trip afoot home for Bob.

Hardly had the boat's course been altered, however, when "Sparks" appeared from the radio room in a state of high excitement, addressed Lieutenant Summers who was on the little bridge, and the two returned together. The wireless room originally had been the chart house. It was equipped for the employment, both sending and receiving, of wireless telegraphy and telephony.

"I wonder what is up," said Captain Folsom to the boys, with whom he was talking in the bow. "Something has come by radio that has excited 'Sparks.' Excuse me, boys, a moment, while I go to inquire."

Captain Folsom, however, had not had time to reach the radio room when Lieutenant Summers again appeared on the bridge, and beckoned both him and the boys to approach.

"I'll explain in a moment," he said, "as soon as I can give the necessary orders."

A number of orders were delivered, and the men on deck leaped to execute them with alacrity. What their purport, was not made known, of course, but the helmsman was given a course direct for Starfish Cove and, in response to signals to the engine room for full speed ahead, the craft seemed fairly to leap through the water.

"Something has happened ashore," said Frank, to his companions. "I wonder what it is."

Their curiosity was soon to be satisfied. Lieutenant Summers led the way below to his cabin, and, once all five were gathered inside, he lost no time in coming to the point.

"The mystery of that sub chaser seen by the crew of the 'Molly M' with your speed boat in tow is in a fair way to be solved," he said. "Also, I have high hopes of catching the ringleader of the liquor smugglers whom Captain Folsom and I have been seeking."

"What? What's that?" demanded Captain Folsom, excitedly.

Lieutenant Summers nodded.

"You couldn't imagine in a thousand years where the radio call came from," he declared, "nor what it was all about. Well, I'll not attempt to mystify you any further. The call was from one of the guards I left posted at the Brownell place, and he was call-

ing, not from the Brownell radio station, but from yours, Hampton."

"From our station?"

Jack was puzzled.

"What's the matter with his own?" asked Frank.

"Our guards have been captured by raiders dressed in naval uniform who disembarked from a sub chaser," said Lieutenant Summers, exploding his bombshell. "Only one man escaped. And he made his way to your station, Hampton, found your man, Tom Barnum, there and began calling for me."

The eyes of the three boys shone, as the implication reached them. The smugglers evidently had obtained possession of a sub chaser and wearing U. S. naval uniforms had carried out a bold coup d'etat, although for what purpose could not be seen at the time. It looked as if there were a fair prospect of action, and all were excited in consequence.

Captain Folsom, however, began hunting at once for causes.

"But why in the world should such a move have been carried out?" he demanded. "Of course, I take it the smugglers have obtained a sub chaser somewhere, together with uniforms. Yet why should they seek to recapture the Brownell place? They could not hope to hold it."

Lieutenant Summers shook his head.

"It's too much for me," he declared. "It's a mystery, indeed. But I am not going to puzzle over that phase of the matter now. What I am interested in is in getting on the ground."

Frank, who had been lost in thought, spoke up unexpectedly.

"Captain Folsom," he said, "isn't it pretty certain such a move would not be carried out except by a man high in the councils of the smugglers?"

"I should imagine so."

"And he would not run the risk of discovery and capture without some very good cause?"

"True."

"Then," said Frank, "is it possible his reason for this act is to drive the guards away or take them prisoner in order to obtain temporary possession of the house and remove incriminating papers—perhaps, from some secret repository—which the smugglers failed to take away or destroy when Lieutenant Summers captured the place last week?"

The others were silent a few moments. Then Captain Folsom said:

"Perhaps, you are correct. Certainly, your theory is plausible. And it would account for such a rash step being taken, by the smugglers."

Further general discussion was abandoned, as Lieutenant Summers felt his services were needed on

deck. The boat was nearing Starfish Cove. Night had fallen. Another half hour would bring them in sight of the strand. Captain Folsom went with the boat's commander to discuss campaign plans. The boys were left to themselves.

"Who do you think this mysterious man behind the operations of the liquor runners can be?" Frank asked, as they leaned in a group apart on the rail, watching the phosphorescence in the water alongside.

"I haven't the least idea," confessed Jack.

"Nor I," said Bob. "Unless, after all, it is Higginbotham."

"No," said Frank, "Captain Folsom declares it cannot be he, that he himself is not a wealthy man, and that he probably is only an agent."

"The little scoundrel," exclaimed Bob. "He's a smooth one to take in Mr. McKay like that. Dad always speaks of Mr. McKay very highly. Think of Higginbotham playing the perfect secretary to him, yet behind his back carrying on such plots as this."

The beat of the engines began to slow down. They were stealing along as close to the shore as Lieutenant Summers dared venture with his craft. Not long before, on this same coast, although not this very spot, Eagle Boat 17 had run aground in the shallows

during a fog, between East Hampton and Amagansett. It behooved the Nark to proceed with caution.

The boys were in the bow now, peering ahead. Starfish Cove was very near. Ahead lay the nearer of the two horns enclosing it. Gradually the little bay opened out around the point of land, and a dark blot showed in the water. The Moon had not yet risen high, but it was a Summer night and not dark.

Suddenly, from the bridge, the glare of the great searchlight carried by the Nark cut through the darkness like the stab of a sword. Lieutenant Summers directed it be played full upon the dark blot ahead, and instantly the latter stood out fully illumined. It was a sub chaser.

Smoke was coming from her funnel. She had steam up. She was preparing to depart. There were a score of figures on her deck. But what delayed her departure was the fact that she waited for a small boat, dancing across the water toward her from the shore. The latter caught full in the glare of the searchlight contained a pair of men tugging frantically at the oars, and a third seated in the stern, grasping the tiller ropes and urging the rowers to exert themselves to the utmost. He wore a cap pulled far down to obscure his features, and did not look up as did his companions when the light smote them.

There was excitement among those on deck of the strange sub chaser. Men ran here and there, as if undirected, not knowing what to do.

"He's running away," cried Frank, suddenly. "Look. In the small boat."

He pointed. True enough, the man at the tiller had swung her about for shore, and the rowers were bending their backs as they sent her along on the opposite course. Moreover, a few strokes more would interpose the strange sub chaser between her and the Nark, and whoever was aboard would escape.

It was a time for quick action. Lieutenant Summers was equal to the occasion. Unknown to the boys, he had ordered the three pounder unlimbered, and now sent a shot ricochetting so close to the small boat that the oarsmen were spattered by the spray and the boat rocked violently. Nevertheless, exhorted by their commander, the rowers, who had ceased at first, bent anew to their oars. Another moment, and they were under the stern of the strange vessel and temporarily safe from danger of shot.

Jack, who had been watching developments breathlessly, ran to the bridge, and called:

"May I make a suggestion, sir?"

"What is it?" asked Lieutenant Summers.

"Whoever is in that boat is heading for the other horn of land enclosing the cove," said Jack, speaking

rapidly. "He will land far out on a narrow peninsula. If we send a boat ashore, on a tangent, we can strike the base of the peninsula in time to cut off his escape by land."

"Good," cried Lieutenant Summers. "I'll order the boat out at once. Do you go in it and point the way."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAN HIGHER UP

THE menace of the shot under her stern, while intended to bring-to the small boat, had the effect of overaweing the strange sub chaser also. As Jack at the tiller, with four men bending to the oars and making the boat sweep through the water at a tremendous rate, passed close astern, he was half fearful a demonstration would be made against them. Nothing of the sort occurred, however, and not even a curious pair of eyes stared at them from the rail.

This was to be accounted for partly by the fact that, immediately after launching and sending away Jack's boat, Lieutenant Summers dropped another overside from the davits, and, accompanied by Captain Folsom, headed directly for the ladder of the strange sub chaser, which was down. And those aboard had eyes only for him.

At the last minute, just as he was about to enter his boat, he saw Frank and Bob watching him longingly from the rail. He smiled.

"Want to come along?"

Did they? The two chums tumbled down the ladder and into the boat so quickly that the invitation was barely uttered when they already occupied seats.

"Let us have a pair of oars, sir," said Bob, "for we can row, and otherwise, if you brought other oarsmen in, we would be in the way."

"Very well," consented Lieutenant Summers. However, he detailed two sailors to take the other pair of oars.

The boat bearing the boarding party drew up at the floating stage and quickly Lieutenant Summers bounded over the rail, followed by Captain Folsom, Bob and Frank, and the two sailors. The boys drew up in rank with the latter, while the two leaders advanced a few steps. Nearly a score in number, the crew of the strange sub chaser were grouped at the foot of the bridge. None coming forward, Lieutenant Summers said sharply:

"Lieutenant Summers, U. S. N., come aboard. Who commands here?"

There was no response. Instead, a struggle seemed to be going on within the group, as if one of its members were trying to escape and the others were restraining him. At a sign from Lieutenant Summers, the sailors loosed the automatics swinging in

holsters about their waists, and prepared for trouble.

"We'd stand a fine chance of getting shot without being able to talk back," whispered Frank to Bob. "Neither of us armed."

"Huh," Bob replied, out of the side of his mouth. "I'd grab me somebody's gun."

The flurry, however, was short-lived. Suddenly, a shrinking figure was expelled from the group of men, as if shot from a cannon's mouth. The search-light from the Nark was playing full upon the scene.

"There's your man," cried a voice, from the group. "Tryin' to hide, he was."

The man looked up, fear and defiance in his features. He was Higginbotham.

"Ah," cried Captain Folsom, sharply, taking a step forward, "so it is you."

Higginbotham looked about desperately, as if seeking a way of escape. But he was cut off at the rail by the guard from the Nark and the boys, while the others had swung about him in a half-circle, barring the way. Seeing an attempt to flee would be futile, he pulled himself together, not without dignity, and faced Captain Folsom and Lieutenant Summers. It was to the former that he addressed himself.

"You've caught me," he said. "The game is up."

He folded his arms.

"What does this mean?" demanded Lieutenant Summers, taking a hand in the proceedings. "Captain, who is this man?"

"That fellow Higginbotham, about whom I told you," said Captain Folsom in an aside. "The man who escaped from the Brownell place."

"Ah." Lieutenant Summers saw the light. He addressed Higginbotham sternly:

"You and your men, masquerading in the uniforms of officers and sailors of the U. S. N.," he said. "You will pay heavily for this, my man. Such masquerade is severely punished by the government."

Higginbotham started to reply, but Frank had an idea. Not waiting to hear what the other had to say, he impulsively stepped forward and plucked Captain Folsom's sleeve.

"That man is trying to delay us, Captain," he whispered. "I am sure of it. He wants the men in the small boat to escape. I'll bet, sir," he said excitedly, "that whoever is in that boat is the Man Higher Up whom you are so anxious to capture."

Captain Folsom was struck by the cogency of Frank's reasoning. Signing to him to fall back, he whispered to Lieutenant Summers. The latter listened, then nodded. He stood silent a moment, thinking.

"I have it," he said. "We'll call another boat from the Nark to go to the assistance of young Hampton."

Placing a whistle to his lips, he blew a shrill blast. A hail came from Jackson, second in command of the Nark, at once. Lieutenant Summers ordered his assistant to come aboard with four men. Waiting the arrival of the other boat, Frank and Bob grew fidgetty and spoke in whispers, while the two officers questioned Higginbotham in low voices.

"All right," said Frank to Bob, "I'll ask him."

Approaching the officers, he stood where Captain Folsom's eyes fell upon him, and the latter, seeing he wanted a word with him, stepped aside.

"Captain," said Frank, eagerly, "Bob and I feel that we have got to go to help Jack. Can't you persuade Lieutenant Summers to let us accompany the party?"

The other smiled slightly, then once more whispered to Lieutenant Summers. The latter looked at Frank, and nodded. Frank fell back to Bob's side, content.

They had not long to wait, before the boat bearing Jackson and four men from the Nark nosed up to their own craft at the landing stage, and Jackson reported to his commander on deck.

"Jackson," Lieutenant Summers said to his young petty officer, "I want you to take command here with

your four men. Disarm these fellows. I do not believe they will show trouble, but it will be well to let them know right at the start that the Nark has them under her guns. I am going to young Hampton's assistance."

Jackson saluted, and called his men aboard. Without more ado, Lieutenant Summers, who was in haste to be off, turned to descend to the boat when once more Frank halted him:

"We are unarmed, Lieutenant," he said.

"Ah. Just a moment. Jackson!"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall order these men to give up their weapons. Stand ready, and keep them covered. Now, my men," he added, addressing the crew; "I am going to place you under arrest. I want you to advance one at a time and submit to being searched and disarmed. I warn you to submit without resistance, for if you do not, the Nark yonder has orders to open fire, and you cannot escape. Now, one at a time."

Sullenly, unwillingly, but overawed, the men advanced. While the sailors from the Nark kept their automatics in their hands, ready for action, Jackson searched each man in businesslike fashion. The weapons thus taken away—regulation automatics, as well as a miscellaneous assortment of brass knuckles and a few wicked daggers, all marking the men as city

toughs—were placed in a heap. Before the work had been completed, Lieutenant Summers, anxious to depart, signed to the boys to arm themselves. They complied.

"Now, let us go," said he.

The boys and their two young sailor companions tumbled into the outside boat, while Captain Folsom and Lieutenant Summers delayed for another word with Jackson. Then, they, too, descended. The oars dipped, and the boat sped away.

All this had taken only a very short space of time. However, the boat bearing the fugitives no longer could be seen, although that carrying Jack—or, at least, what they took to be his boat—was still off-shore, though close to it. It looked like a little dark blot some distance ahead, nearing the landward base of the peninsula. On that horn of land, all felt assured, the fugitives had landed, and along it were making their way to shore.

Jack's boat now reached the shore. Lieutenant Summers, gazing through the nightglass, spied Jack and his quartette leap to land. Then he searched the spit of land through the glass. An exclamation broke from him.

"Young Hampton is just in time," he said. "I can see three figures running along the peninsula

towards him. Pull your hardest, lads, and we shall soon be up with them."

The two sailors and Bob and Frank bent to the oars with a will, and the boat fairly leaped through the water. Their backs were towards the land and they could not see the development of events, but Lieutenant Summers, realizing, perhaps, the anxiety of the chums for their comrade, gave them occasional bulletins. Jack and his party had taken cover, apparently, for they could no longer be seen. Lieutenant Summers was of the opinion, however, that their presence was known to the enemy. It could not well have been otherwise, as the latter must have seen Jack's manœuvre to cut them off.

Suddenly a half dozen shots rang out.

"Pull your best lads. Almost there," cried Lieutenant Summers, who was in the bow. "Now. One more big pull and we'll be up on the sand."

There was a soft jar. The boat's nose tilted upwards. Then, disregarding footgear, all leaped overside into the shallow water, and six pairs of hands ran the boat well up on the sand.

"This way," cried Lieutenant Summers, dashing ahead.

The others followed on the run. No further shots had been fired. But the sounds of panting men engaged body to body in the brush came to them.

As he ran, Lieutenant Summers cast the rays of a powerful hand light ahead. Right at the edge of the trees the two parties were engaged. But the fugitives were outnumbered, five to three, and, as the reinforcements against them, arrived, the struggle came abruptly to an end.

The first upon whom Lieutenant Summer's light fell was Jack, astride a form. Then the light fell on the fallen man's features and a cry broke from Bob's lips.

"Why, it's Mr. McKay."

CHAPTER XXV

MCKAY'S STORY

AFTER all, the mystery was easily explained; the mystery as to the identity of the man behind the operations of the liquor-smugglers. The explanation of the whole situation was unfolded by Captain Folsom several nights later at the Temple home. He had come from New York City at the invitation of Mr. Temple, whose curiosity was aroused by the tales of the boys, and who wanted to hear a connected account of events. In this matter, Captain Folsom was willing to oblige, more especially by reason of the aid given the government forces by the boys.

J. B. McKay was the Man Higher Up. Higginbotham was his agent. This man, one of the wealthiest realty operators in New York, was a born gambler. He could never resist the impulse to engage in a venture that would bring him big returns on his investment. In his realty operations, this

quality had earned him the name of "Take a Chance" McKay.

When the Eighteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution was adopted—the prohibition amendment—he watched developments. He felt certain that liquor smuggling would spring up. In this he was not mistaken. New York became a vast center of the traffic.

And as he beheld the great sums made by the men bringing liquor into the country in defiance of the law, the thought came to McKay of how these individual operators might be united by a strong and ruthless man, their methods improved, and a vast fortune made by the man in control. Thereupon he set about obtaining this control.

It was McKay, said Captain Folsom, who organized the motor truck caravan which brought liquor across the Canadian border into Northern New York to a distributing center, a night's run to the South, whence it was sent across the land by express as china and glassware from a china and glassware manufactory. This factory was mere camouflage. A plant did exist, but it was nothing more than a storage warehouse at which the motor trucks unloaded their cargoes.

Police protection was needed, of course, and police protection McKay obtained. The factory so-called

was in the open country, on the outskirts of a tiny village. The local authorities were bribed. All along the route from Canada, money was liberally spent in order to prevent interference from police. Big cities en route were avoided. The Highway of Grease ("grease" meaning bribery) led around all such, for in them usually the police were incorruptible.

It was McKay, too, who organized the airplane carriage of liquor from Canada to points outside New York City and to Stamford, Conn. One of his planes only recently, explained Captain Folsom, had fallen in a field near Croton-on-Hudson, with a valuable cargo of liquor aboard after a night's flight from Canada.

But it was in organizing the importation of liquor from the Bahamas that McKay reached his heights. He had assembled a fleet of old schooners, many of which had seen better days and lacked business, commanded by skippers who were in desperate need of money, and he had taken advantage of their necessity by making what to them were tempting offers. Some boats he had purchased outright, others chartered for long periods.

These boats would work their way up the Atlantic coast to specified points on the Jersey and Long Island coastlines. Then they would discharge their

cargoes, and men waiting alongshore with trucks would carry the liquor to distributing points.

More recently, Captain Folsom added, McKay had begun to utilize radio. To avoid the employment of more than a minimum force of men, was his primary object. In the first place, big crews made a steady drain in wages. Likewise, there was an added danger of mutiny when large crews were employed. The men were bound to realize that, inasmuch as he was violating the law, he could not appeal for legal retaliation in case they should seize a vessel and dispose of it and its contents. Therefore, he decided to depend on trusty skippers, whom he paid well, and skeleton crews whom the skippers and mates could control.

Thus the radio-controlled boats, which were really not boats at all, came into existence. And for their control, the station on Long Island was established and two others, in isolated spots on the Jersey coast, were in process of construction when the end came. At the time of Higginbotham's discovery by the boys and their interference in McKay's schemes, McKay was absent in New Jersey, personally superintending the construction of the plants.

Higginbotham, in fleeing from the Brownell place, had neglected some damaging correspondence which would have betrayed McKay's identity as the con-

trolling power in the liquor smuggling ring. He had fled to his employer, and told him of the danger.

At the time, McKay had standing offshore an Eagle boat, built for submarine chasing during the World War, but which two years earlier the United States government had sold during a period of reduction of expenses. This boat he had kept in the Bahamas, but recently had brought North. He intended to use it to protect liquor runners as escort, the assumption being that, thinking it one of themselves, other boats of the "Dry Navy" would leave the vessels alone.

How he had obtained possession of the naval uniforms for his men Captain Folsom did not know. However, the doughty captain assumed McKay probably had bought discarded uniforms in some manner, or else had had them made on order.

When Higginbotham reached him with the news, after working his way through Brooklyn and New York in disguise, having lain hidden several days in order to avoid the first heat of the search which he knew would be made for him, McKay had decided to go to the Brownell place in the sub chaser. He figured its appearance would disarm the suspicions of the guards left by Lieutenant Summers, and that his men in uniform would get close enough before their identities were discovered to carry the place

without force. Their superior numbers would compel surrender on the part of a handful of guards.

Such proved to be the case. One of the guards, however, escaped and, making his way to the Hampton radio station, had sent out the call which brought the Nark to the scene just as McKay was making his escape.

CHAPTER XXVI

CONCLUSION

THE boys received great praise for their part in breaking up the plot, and bringing the perpetrators to book. For them, the balance of the summer went quietly. The escaping thieves who had stolen their speed boat had made their way to McKay's retreat in New Jersey, and there later the boat was recovered. In it, all spent many pleasant hours.

The budding romance between Marjorie Faulkner and big Bob developed considerably during the balance of her stay at the Temple home, which lasted for several more weeks. They were together much of the time, walking, swimming, boating, flying. For the damaged airplane was repaired and Bob took the young girl frequently aloft.

All five young people took part jointly in many affairs, but Bob got Marjorie to himself as much as possible. The others chaffed them a good deal, but as the banter was all good-natured, it was not resented.

Della and Frank, too, drew more closely together that summer. They had lived in the same house for years, and had grown up together. Now as they stood on the verge of young manhood and young womanhood, a subtle change in their relations of comradeship came to pass. They were still good pals, but there was something deeper in their feelings for each other.

Jack sighed one night, as he and his chums sat alone on the beach, after a late plunge. The girls had gone visiting with Mrs. Temple.

"Here's Frank," he said, "getting thicker every day with Della. Here's old Bob, who has lost his head over Marjorie. I'm left out in the cold."

"Well, why don't you go back to capture Senorita Rafaela?" asked Bob, slyly. "When we flew away from her ranch that day, you said you were going to come back for her, you know."

Bob's reference was to the daughter of Don Fernandez y Calomares, an aristocrat of pure Castilian blood living in a palace in the Sonora mountains in Old Mexico. The previous summer, the Don as leader of a faction of Mexican rebels had kidnapped Jack's father, mining engineer in charge of oil properties in New Mexico, and carried him prisoner to his retreat. Thereby, the Don had hoped to embroil the United States with President Obregon of Mexico,

perhaps to bring about American intervention, all of which would be of benefit to the rebel cause. Mr. Temple, however, had decided the kidnapping of his friend and business associate should be kept secret, in order to prevent American intervention which he considered would be harmful to both countries. The boys had gone into Old Mexico and, through a series of exciting adventures as related in "The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border," had effected Mr. Hampton's rescue. Jack had fallen victim to the charms of the Don's daughter.

Now, at Bob's words, Jack said nothing, but looked away over the moonlit water.

Well, his thoughts often when he was alone were concerned with the fascinating Spanish girl. Even the passage of a year's time had not served to efface her image from his memory. Someday ——

"Come on," said he, jumping up, and pushing his two companions over into the sand. "Beat you home."

He darted away, and they tore after him.

At the end of the summer, all three boys went away to Yale at New Haven, Conn. Jack was in his second year, a Sophomore. Bob and Frank entered as Freshmen.

During their college year, all three kept alive their interest in radio, and followed every new develop-

ment. Jack even went further, inventing a revolutionary device for the application of radio. Of that, there is no space to speak now. But in an account of their further adventures it will be properly introduced.

The following vacation period, Mr. Hampton went to Peru in connection with the development of rich mining properties in a new region, and took Jack with him. Frank and Bob pleaded so hard for permission to accompany the Hamptons that Mr. Temple gave his consent.

There, an amazing series of adventures befell them. But they will be duly recorded in "The Radio Boys Search for the Incas' Treasure."

THE END

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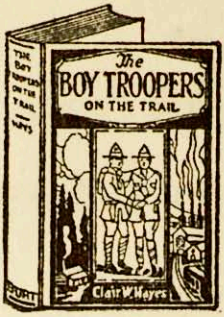

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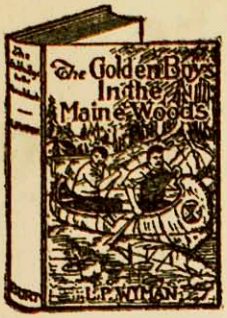

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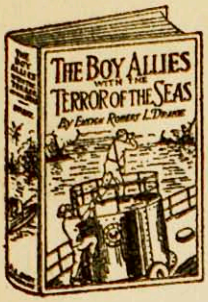

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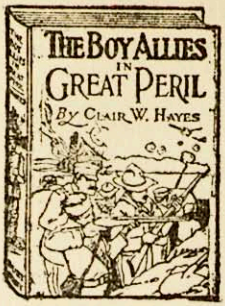

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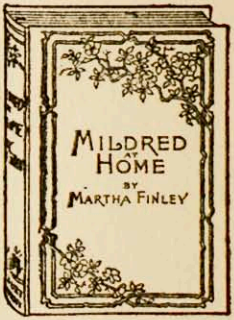

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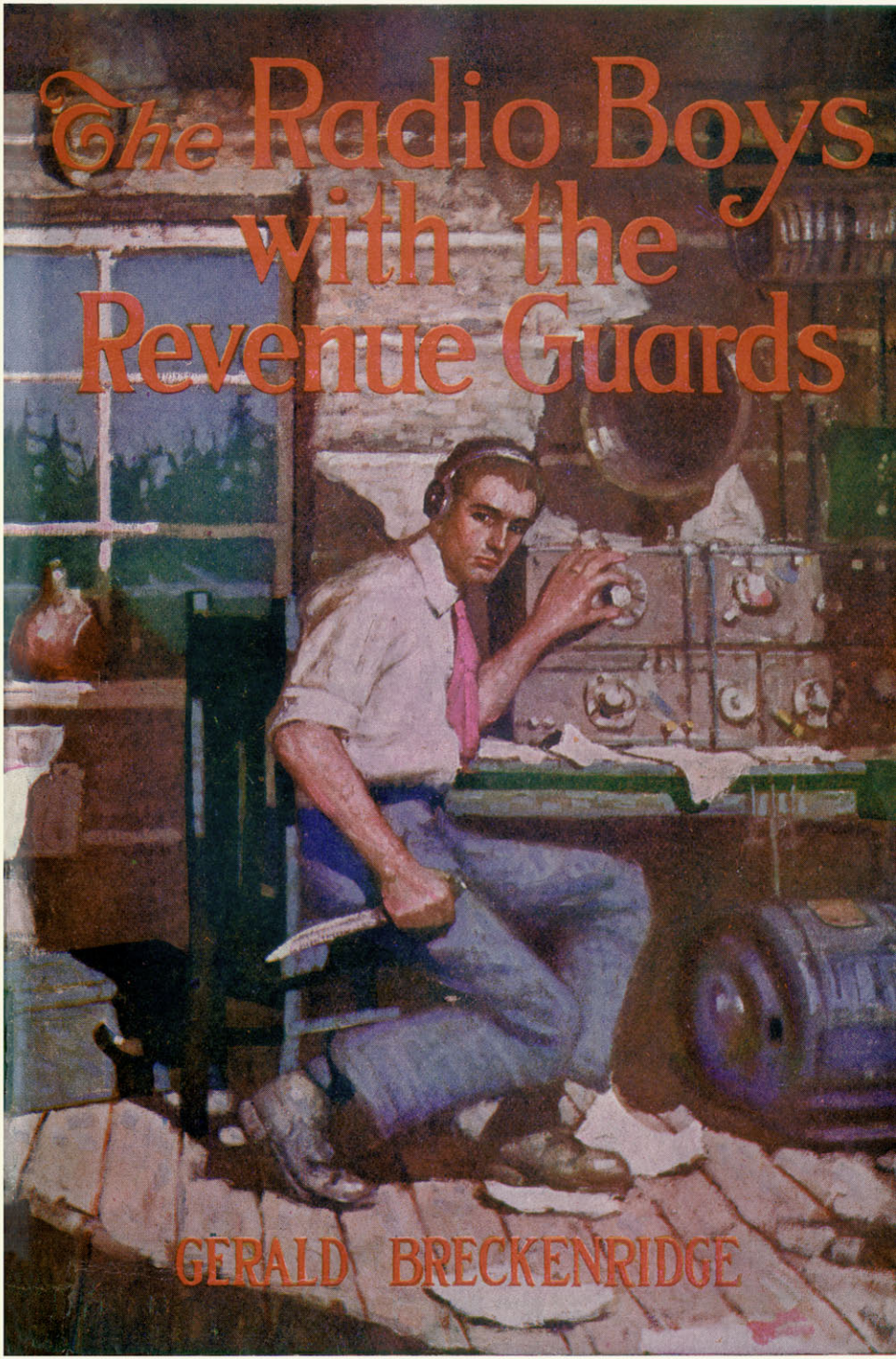
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